

Sermon “An Attitude of Gratitude”
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Colossians 3.16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Luke 17: 12-19

¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers* approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus’* feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, ‘Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?’ ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ ¹⁹Then he said to him, ‘Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.’

Sermon “An Attitude of Gratitude”

“With Gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.” Isn’t that what we do in church on Sunday mornings?

We come to church to give praise and thanks to our God. We come to church and we sing. With gratitude in our hearts we sing- hymns, psalms and spiritual songs. When we have gratitude in our hearts, we can’t help but sing. Singing and gratitude go together. And when we sing songs with gratitude in our hearts, something happens. As we raise our voices in thanksgiving, we lift our spirits and we feed our souls.

I imagine that the man who was healed of his leprosy was filled with gratitude. It was overflowing from his heart. I imagine that his spirit and his soul were soaring. After all, he was healed. His leprosy was gone. He was no longer sick. And he was no longer an outcast in society. He could rejoin society. To be able to rejoin people would have been such a great blessing! I don’t know how much of that went through his head. I just know he was overjoyed.

I know that because we hear that when he saw that he was healed, he “turned back, praising God with a loud voice, he prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.” That man didn’t just send Jesus a polite thank you note. He didn’t just walk up to Jesus and shake his hand while saying “Thank you, Jesus.” He loudly praised God. He dropped to his knees at Jesus’ feet to thank him!

Now I was not raised in a faith tradition where people in the congregation would spontaneously typically break out into “Thank you, Jesus” during worship. This practice is not something I have seen while attending worship in most mainline Christian churches.

But I saw it during worship while I was in seminary at Yale Divinity School. You see, there were daily chapel services that were attended and led by individuals of different Christian traditions. Some of the students, especially those young men and women from Black churches were very spontaneous and vocal in their prayer or in response to something the preacher was saying. So when the preacher would preach the word of God, I mean really get up there and preach with gusto, we would hear, “Amen, Brother” or “Amen, Sister” or “Alleluia,” or “Thank you, Jesus.” It was spontaneous. Natural. From the heart. It was amazing. Like that man with leprosy who was healed, falling to his knees, prostrating himself and thanking Jesus. I wonder what the bystanders thought seeing that awesome display of gratitude.

Well, Jesus told this man that his faith had saved him. Jesus linked gratitude and faith. After asking this Samaritan, who was looked down upon by Jews, who might still be ostracized by Jews even though he was healed of his leprosy, after asking this man where were the other 9 that were healed; Jesus told him that his faith had healed him.

This man had called out to Jesus, asking Jesus to “have mercy” on him. He did not say, Jesus heal me. He asked for mercy. When we go to a doctor’s appointment, we do not say, “Doctor, have mercy on me.” When we ask for mercy, we usually ask for it from someone we have wronged or we ask it of God. This man with leprosy asked for mercy. He had not wronged Jesus. He had faith in Jesus. And it was his faith that healed him and his faith that brought him back to Jesus after he was healed to give thanks.

In the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, we hear “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) Our God wants us to give thanks.

So how do we give thanks? Singing. Praising. Praying. Dropping to our knees. Those are all wonderful ways to give thanks. But to do them in all circumstances, that can be a little daunting at times. How do we give thanks in all circumstances? After all there are circumstances in our lives that do not inspire us to give thanks. You know them – the diagnosis of a serious illness, the loss of a job and having to choose which bills to pay a certain month, the loss of a loved one, or a divorce. These circumstances or events can be stressful, difficult, and even painful. But Paul is not telling us to give thanks for the unfortunate happenings, but to build each other up, to be at peace, to encourage others, to be patient, to hold on to what is good, and to give thanks in the midst of struggles.

In his book, The Gratitude Path, Kent Millard shares the story of the hymn we just sang – “Now Thank We All Our God.” This favorite traditional hymn was written by a German Lutheran Pastor, Marin Rinkart, in 17th century Eilenburg during the 30 Years’ War. Pastor Rinkart was not rich, in fact he could barely feed his family, but he opened his home to political and military

refugees. In 1637 his city was overcome by the plague. Thousands died, including his wife. He was the only pastor in the city and at times, had to do as many as 50 funerals on one day. He even officiated his wife's funeral.

It was in the midst of these circumstances that Pastor Rinkart wrote the words we sang just a few minutes ago but they are worth repeating again:

**1. Now thank we all our God,
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom this world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.**

**2. O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us still in grace,
and guide us when perplexed;
and free us from all ills,
in this world and the next.**

**3. All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given;
the Son, and him who reigns
with them in highest heaven;
the one eternal God,
whom earth and heaven adore;
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.**

In the midst of war, plague, hunger, suffering, and death Pastor Rinkart not only reached out to thousands of people by opening his doors, feeding them, saying their funerals – but he thanked God for God's goodness, God's blessings, and countless gifts of love – "Now." In the present, in midst of it all, he gave thanks and encouraged those who would sing his song to give thanks. He believed that God was present in even in the midst of deplorable circumstances that I am sure none of us can even imagine. His faith infused him with joy, gratitude, praise, and thanksgiving to God.

Now Thank We All Our God – with Hearts and Hands and Voices.....who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices.

While we may not know many who are writing hymns of gratitude and praise in the midst of awful circumstances, I have met many people whose faith kept them going –

A grandmother with a tracheostomy due to her cancer who blessed me and every single person who visited her every single time we visited. And she glowed as she said it. She meant it from the bottom of her heart.

The woman whose son died in an accident, but still believes that God has been with her every day of her life and is grateful to God despite that terrible tragedy.

A father of 2 young boys who was paralyzed from the waist down and wheelchair bound but went to church each Sunday in a van that his friend from church modified to accept his wheelchair. And he praised God and cherished time with his family.

The woman who had to go through chemotherapy because of her cancer who thanked people for their prayers, even in the midst of side effects that affected her life in many ways. She believed that the prayers were helping her.

And the daughter who sat at her mother's bedside for weeks on the hospice unit, much of it while her mother was unresponsive, hoping that her mother would pass. Initially she told me how hard it was. Later she told me that over time she realized that this time was a gift because it let her mend a fractured relationship with her mother and come to grips with her mother's dying. She was grateful for that time.

I bet that each person here has had a time in their life when they have struggled, but also found a reason to give thanks – whether it was for a loved one, a friend, or the feeling that God was with them and loved them in the midst of it all.

Give thanks in all circumstances.

We live in difficult times – though I don't know that they are any more difficult than when Jesus and the Samaritan leper lived or when Pastor Rinkhart lived. But the Samaritan leper and the Pastor gave thanks. The Samaritan threw himself at Jesus' feet. The Pastor composed a hymn that lives on still today. They expressed their gratitude in their own way but their faith and their gratitude went together.

In this upcoming Thanksgiving week, I invite you to pause and drop to your knees, either in body or in spirit, to give thanks to God for some blessing in your life. Then let us praise God with joy in our hearts and maybe even with shouts of "Thank you, God! Alleluia! Amen!"

