

GRATITUDE

Luke 17:11-19

The great 20th century theologian Karl Barth said that “*Gratitude is the precise creaturely counterpart to the grace of God.*” In other words our gratitude is the human reflection – the closest we can come to a mirror image – of God’s grace.

We see that in the Gospel story of the 10 lepers. All 10 were *cleansed*. They were healed of their leprosy. And they were cleansed of the official verdict their disease rendered on them: *unclean, an outcast, despised, rejected*. They were restored to community, to life, to family and friends, allowed to return to their homes and live again in community. No longer outcast they were now acceptable.

Their *cleansing* is a wonderful picture of the grace God offers to each of us. He transforms us from *unclean* to *forgiven*, from *broken* to *whole*, from *rejected* to *God’s chosen people*, from *sinners*, to *redeemed*. We have no claim on his love and mercy other than our brokenness and need and his mercy, no ability to repay, nothing we can offer in return. Apart from the grace of God we are as broken and needy as those lepers.

All 10 lepers were healed. But only one returned to Jesus to express his great thanks. And only to this one, the leper who responded with gratitude, did Jesus say, *your faith has made you whole*. “*Made whole*” is from the same Greek word as *saved*. The others were healed this one was saved. The others found their families, their occupations, their businesses, and their lives; this one found his Redeemer. All 10 received an amazing gift of grace and healing but only one reflected that healing back to its source by returning to Jesus to give him thanks.

The word *Eucharist* means *thanksgiving*. And the heart of the Holy *Eucharist* is the prayer of consecration that we call the *great thanksgiving*. In that prayer we remember how Jesus *took* bread, *blessed* it, *broke* the bread and *gave* it to his disciples. Those simple actions – where Jesus *took, blessed, broke* and *gave* the bread – are actions we revere as Christians and come together to reenact each week because they are the way Jesus invited us to remember him. More than that they are a key way that Jesus promised to continue to be with us. For we not only remember him in the bread and wine, we also receive him. There is yet another profound meaning to this *great thanksgiving*. And that meaning is that *we are his Body*. The Eucharistic Prayer, the Great Thanksgiving is not only about Jesus giving himself for the life of the world and our receiving him; it is also about Jesus giving us as his Body for the life of the world. Jesus takes us, blesses us, breaks us, and gives us as his Body for the life of the world.

For me Jesus’ 4-fold actions in the Great Thanksgiving define *eucharistic* or *thankful* living. They express our grateful response as an echo of God’s Grace. God chooses you, calls you by name, calls each of us to be his own. In our baptisms God has claimed us personally as his own beloved child. God loves you completely, fully, without your having done anything to deserve it. God himself created you and knows you more fully than we know yourself. He *takes* us as bread.

And then Jesus *blesses* us. He sets apart to be his chosen, holy people. He blesses us with his love, his forgiveness, his very life and power. He blesses us with the invitation to live fully, truly, deeply in him. He blesses us by promising to be with us always no matter what. He blesses us by welcoming us back even when we stray far, far away from his love. Over and over again Jesus *blesses* us.

Then we are broken. I don't think of that so much as Jesus' action of breaking us, but as Jesus' recognition of our deep brokenness. Which one of us is not broken? We are broken by the world. We are broken in fear, in hurt, in disappointment, in failure, in rejection. Each of us knows what it is to be broken. Jesus' action is to be broken with us – to so identify with our hurts and brokenness that he is with us fully in them as he dies broken and bleeding for us upon the cross. We need to know our own brokenness and the brokenness and pain in the world in order to be part of God's healing love, part of God's identification with the world. We need to identify with that broken needy world.

And then as God's chosen, blessed and broken people we are *given* to a hungry needy world. As Jesus was a servant for others so he calls us to serve. As he loved so he calls us to love. We are *given* out to bless and feed and love and serve. We are *given* to our families, *given* to our friends, *given* to our parish community, and *given* to those whom we can help in the world.

Eucharistic living means that Jesus *takes, blesses, breaks* and *gives* us as his Body, his life and presence in the world. Living *Eucharistically* means receiving and reflecting back God's grace in gratitude for all that we receive in Christ.

As Eucharistic people we can develop some habits of thanksgiving – a gratitude attitude. It's a wonderful thing to remember to say thanks to God at meal time. But why only at meal time? GK Chesterton suggests that we should be saying grace almost continuously.

You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink." — G. K. Chesterton

Thank you God for the gifts of creativity and hard work and beauty that are behind everything I do and enjoy. Thank you God for all the amazing talent that went into this movie. Thank you for the creativity and years of practice that went into the musicians who offer me this song. "If," as Rabbi Harold Kushner writes, "you concentrate on finding what is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul."

Our sense of thanksgiving should extend to all situations, even those that are painful, difficult or challenging. We are not called to thank God for ravages of a disease or the pain and hurt inflicted by human beings, but even in the midst of

illness, in the midst of hurt and struggle and suffering, there is grace and goodness to be discovered and much still to be thankful for. I love this anonymous prayer from an unknown author suggesting our thankfulness in all circumstances.

Be Thankful

Be thankful that you don't already have everything you desire,
If you did, what would there be to look forward to?

Be thankful when you don't know something
For it gives you the opportunity to learn.

Be thankful for the difficult times.
During those times you grow.

Be thankful for your limitations
Because they give you opportunities for improvement.

Be thankful for each new challenge
Because it will build your strength and character.

Be thankful for your mistakes
They will teach you valuable lessons.

Be thankful when you're tired and weary
Because it means you've made a difference.

It is easy to be thankful for the good things.
A life of rich fulfillment comes to those who are
also thankful for the setbacks.

GRATITUDE can turn a negative into a positive.
Find a way to be thankful for your troubles
and they can become your blessings.

<http://abundance-blog.marelisa-online.com/2009/08/11/49-gratitude-quotes-and-a-poem-of-thankfulness/>

We also grow in thankfulness and practice that attitude of gratitude through giving back. We give back through our kindness and service to those in need, through volunteering, through service projects and through our charitable giving.

At St. John's we are just entering into our fall pledge appeal with the second year of *New Consecration Sunday*. The main focus of this program, and the reason we are using it as a vehicle for pledging, is that it reminds us that our primary reason for financial giving to

the Church is gratitude. We pledge a financial gift to God in thanks giving for all that we continually receive from God's hand. Our financial pledges – our tithe – are perhaps the most concrete measure of our return of thanks and gratitude to God for all he has given us. We'll hear a lot more about that. Next Sunday Stephen Clapp will give his witness about making that gift in the form of a lay sermon.

We develop a *gratitude attitude* through practicing saying *thank you* to God for all his good gifts. We grow in that attitude as we thank God for even the challenges and difficulties we face. We grow in that attitude as we give back, both in acts of service and financially through our tithes and charitable offerings.

The Christian life is one of Eucharistic living – of Jesus taking, blessing, breaking and giving us out as his Body for the world. That is our great thanksgiving. Karl Barth described gratitude as “the precise creaturely counterpart to the grace of God.” It is the closest we can come to a mirror image to God's grace. It is a wonderful thing to receive God's grace of healing and forgiveness and new life, as did those 10 lepers Jesus healed. It is far greater still to reflect back that grace through returning to give God thanks and be made whole. Let us join the poet George Herbert in prayer.

Thou that has given so much to me,
Give one thing more—a grateful heart;
Not thankful when it pleaseth me,
As if thy blessings had spare days;
But such a heart, whose pulse may be
Thy praise.”
– George Herbert