

Returning Thanks

Luke 17:11-19 by Patty Friesen Oct. 9/16

Today's scripture about the 10 lepers who were healed and only one returned to give thanks has always been one of my favourites. With luscious detail, Luke tells us that on his way to Jerusalem the holy city for the religious festival of Passover and his own death, Jesus was going through the slums of Samaria when 10 lepers approached him because they didn't know they shouldn't come near people because they were unclean. They know who he is and call out, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us, and as Julie said in her sermon a couple of weeks ago, mercy always trumps justice. And Jesus tells them to go and show themselves to the priests for the officially clean assessment and even though they were not yet healed, they went and were healed on the way. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him and he was a Samaritan.

With a wry reply, Jesus said, were not all ten made clean? But where are the other nine? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? Then Jesus said to him, get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well.

This is the third Samaritan we hear about who is held up as an example of faith and thanksgiving. The woman at the well, the good Samaritan and the healed leper. There is something about the humility of these three heroes of the gospels that Jesus highlights despite their lowly positions in society. Again Julie and Terry both spoke about humility and kindness as

the Christian virtues held up for us in Luke's gospel. Believe me, I check out what people preach when I'm gone! To see if they're leading the flock astray.

Both Terry and Julie mentioned how the folks at Friendship Inn influence our experience of the humility and kindness of those already brought low by life's experiences. Our thankful leper is someone easily from Friendship Inn, the lowly of the lowly who come from generational poverty and addictions and yet somehow find a way to look out for others, help them find a seat at the tables and go up for extra dessert. And the most touching words I hear at Friendship Inn are clients' thank-you. I'm humbled by their thanks because it is no skin off my nose to be there from my life of privilege and their thankfulness tells me they don't take food or service for granted. Jesus liked to be thanked too. We all do.

I am thankful for the past two years of ministry at Osler Mennonite. I began on Thanksgiving Sunday, 2014 thinking it would be a year interim and I'm still here. I'd like to be here as long as Bill Kroeger who was here for six years so we have four more Thanksgivings to go! I like that my anniversary here will always be on Thanksgiving which gives me occasion to reflect with gratitude on God's leading and work among us.

This past year has been intense – five deaths of very important and well-loved people in our lives: John Bueckert, Annie Guenther, Jeff Rempel, Betty Dyck and Sarah Hiebert. We usually average only one death a year so this has been a whopper and we miss these loved ones who were a part of our daily lives and all who were lively and interested in life right up to their deaths. We will remember them in a special way on Memorial Sunday, November 20. In the past year, we've had three strokes of lively active men: John Wall, Wilf Buhler and Jake Buhler.

This has been a shock for us and a life changer for them but we're so grateful they are still with us and have accepted their strokes with grace and humour. We've had two open heart surgeries: Tracy Baudais and Gaye Guenther, both unexpected and scary and requiring recovery which these women have also managed with grace and more patience than I'd have. We've had happy things too like a new baby, Walter and two weddings – Sandy and Torben and Terri Lynn and Thomas but those have been life changing experiences as well and require adjustment.

I've counted at least 24 households and extended family have been impacted by life changing events this year. What do we learn about God with us in the midst of these events? To be honest, I've struggled to find meaning and the presence of God in the midst of some of this trauma and I'm the one paid to find it! But going directly from Sarah's deathbed at Rosthern hospital to Jake and Louise in RUH ER does a number on one's faith. Enough already, God, we can't take any more of this. Often it's been those most directly affected like Sarah and Jake who have helped me calm down and take it one day at a time, trusting God will show up somewhere along the way.

I'm most thankful for our community in times of crisis, pulling together to visit those in hospital and pulling together to make a funeral lunch and providing care for each other, and for me, each step along the way. We wouldn't have survived this year without each other.

Other big events this year have been adding an additional $\frac{3}{4}$ time staff person, Terri Lynn. I wasn't sure when we advertised the position that we'd find anyone and we had to negotiate the $\frac{3}{4}$ time bump from $\frac{1}{2}$ time to make it affordable for her and it may still be a bit of

a budget challenge but we've taken it on in good faith and are so fortunate to have the combination of her gifts, intelligence, maturity and availability. I take that as God's presence in this process of expanding our ministry to our youth and children and to the community and I'm thankful.

I'm thankful that we can talk about issues in our congregation like gay marriage and open communion tables and it can be a vibrant, passionate, intelligent conversation and even if we don't all agree on everything about the conversation, we stick it out together and I'm thankful for that. And so we gather everything we are thankful for this morning, in this remembrance of thanksgiving for the one who calls us and heals us. We return thanks for the life we have in Jesus and the strength and healing he gives us to go through life's dramas. We will receive the gluten-free bread in the pews, holding it and passing the peace of Christ to your neighbours and we will all take together. Then we will do the same with the grape juice and conclude with prayer and our closing hymn.

As the leper returned to give thanks for healing, we return to the feet of Jesus with this prayer over the bread: Our Gracious Lord, source of all life and healing, who helps us grow in wholeness, physically and spiritually, we pray for healing and inner peace. We pray for patience and for understanding. We pray for a deepening of faith and belief in you, our loving God. Amen.

In the same way we pray over the cup: For the gift of your life given for us, we pray for all that we may know your unconditional and eternal love for us. Assure us of your presence and fill us with hope that our lives are held in your hand. Amen.