

Thanksgiving as a Way of Life

I'd like to start my sermon with two questions for you. What is your favourite Thanksgiving memory? And what does Thanksgiving mean to you? Just think about it and please share your story with the person who is sitting beside you.

Let me share first. My favourite Thanksgiving memory happened just last year. I roasted a turkey for the first time in my life. I was thrilled to roast the turkey, I was proud of my home-made cranberry sauce, and I was so happy to see how the turkey became a feast not only for my family but also for my friends from Japan and the Philippines. Even though each of us was facing some challenges while seeking a new life in Canada, all of us experienced an abundance of joy and blessings from one another and from God at the Thanksgiving table. For me Thanksgiving is a reminder that we are all blessed by God in every circumstance. Now I invite you to share your story in two minutes. Did everyone have time to share? What did you notice in sharing? Can you tell me anything you found interesting?

I noticed that everyone has a good memory of Thanksgiving, and I wonder what it will look like if we live every day with that memory. I wonder how to live a life of thanksgiving; not just for sharing abundant food, but for sharing our faith, joy, love and many blessings as well. I think we can learn about thanksgiving as a way of life from today's story.

Ten people were cured, but only one of them came back to Jesus and thanked him. The story seems simple and we are tempted to blame the nine people who forgot to say "thank you". But - did the nine actually do something wrong? Jesus didn't tell them to come back to thank him. He just said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." That's what they were supposed to do, as the priests had the final say on who was, and who was not, cured of leprosy. Until a priest said the ten were cured, they would still be considered unclean. So let's

not blame any of the ten. Instead, let them teach us how to ask Jesus for help first.

Notice the words in Luke 17:12, “keeping their distance”. These people lived in total isolation: banished from their homes, from the loving touch of spouses, children, parents, from the faith community. They lived alone. They knew their boundary, but their desperate need of help crossed the boundary to reach out to Jesus. So when they heard that Jesus was passing through, they called out, saying “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

Everybody, in some ways, needs help, but not everybody can say “I need your help” - it takes honesty and a humble spirit to ask for help. It’s so easy to help others, and so hard to ask for help when we need it ourselves. However, asking for help could be a starting point for a new relationship, especially with God. That’s what the ten people did with Jesus. They knew how to ask Jesus for help and all of them experienced healing, but not all of them knew how to respond to that healing; not all of them were able to deepen their relationship with God through that one encounter with Jesus.

In the Gospels we can see many people who received help and healing from Jesus - but not all of them remained followers of Jesus. Jesus gave healing without any strings attached – he did not demand gratitude or praise from those he touched. But seeing the healings that ended there – as with the former outcasts laughing their way away from Jesus – is like seeing a bridge that spans halfway over a river and then stops in mid-air. Healing takes you this far – and there has to be thanks-giving to take you the rest of the way to a life in Christ.

The difference between the person who came back to Jesus and the other nine was that one person saw their healing as a chance to be connected to Jesus, and nine simply saw the healing as a happy turn-around of their fortunes. You could say that ten people were healed, but only one man was truly made whole.

In Luke 17:15-17, “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. Then Jesus said to him, “your faith has made you well.” Here Jesus points to a profound understanding of faith in this story. The actual healing does not guarantee us a life of thanksgiving. It is the gratitude in the one man’s heart, not the healing, that brings him back to Jesus. And it is the thanking of Christ that makes him whole, and such thankfulness is available to all in every circumstance. I believe that a thankful life comes from the realization of our dependent life on God and our interdependent life on one another.

If you reflect on your own life earnestly, you might be surprised to see how many people have helped you in your life; your parents, your grandparents, your partner, your children, your friends, your teachers and those who you don’t even remember or recognize. Likewise, you can’t count how many people you have helped in your life. We are more dependent on each other than we realize. Actually everything is connected and interdependent.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk and a peace activist uses a chair to describe the interdependence of everything. He said, “When we look at a chair, we see the wood, but we fail to observe the tree, the forest, the carpenter, or our own mind. When we meditate on it, we can see the entire universe in all its interwoven and interdependent relations in the chair. The presence of the wood reveals the presence of the tree. The presence of the leaf reveals the presence of the sun. The presence of the apple blossoms reveals the presence of the apple. Those who observe can see the one in the many and the many in the one... The chair is not separate. It exists only in its interdependent relations with everything in the universe. It *is* only because all other things *are*.”

In this thanksgiving, let us be reminded that we are all connected with one another and that we are dependent on each other and most of all on God. That realization will lead us to a life of thanksgiving all the time and everywhere.