

**“Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow”**

Date: Nov. 20, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Luke 17:11-19

Theme: Thanksgiving

Occasion: Christ the King, Thanksgiving Sunday

Next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent, and on the Christian calendar, it is the first Sunday of a new liturgical year. On *this* Sunday, today, we celebrate Christ the King Sunday, and as well we remember to give God thanks for our many blessings.

The two occasion seem to go together so well, because of all our blessings, the gift of God’s own Son, Christ our Savior, is the greatest gift of all.

In the familiar story of the ten men with leprosy who were healed by Jesus, only one returned to say “thank you.” What happened to the rest? Too busy? Perhaps. Too self-occupied? More likely. But could it be, that a few of the nine who didn’t say thanks, didn’t feel all that grateful?

Could it be that they still felt like outcasts? Were they thinking to themselves, “Well, yes, I’m healed. But still, I’ve got to get a job now, and support myself. I lost everything while I was sick. My own family turned their back on me. What do I do now?” And so, rather than feeling grateful for what had been done for them, they were anxious, perhaps even terrified, about what lay ahead.

People react to life so differently. The old proverb about those who see the glass half full and those who see it half empty seems so appropriate. Some people are like the little boy who went to a birthday party. On his return, his mother asked, “Bobby, did you thank the lady for the party?”

“Well, I was going to,” he said, “but a girl ahead of me said *thank you*, and the lady told her not to mention it. So I didn’t.”

And so it is that many people take what they have for granted, or assume that

they deserve what they have, or feel entitled to more because other people have “it.”

A sense of entitlement, I think, is one of the things that is eroding the greatness of our country. Instead of being grateful for our blessings, we feel entitled to more. Not because of our own hard work, but this belief that life owes me. You can be cynical and blame the welfare system if you want, but it's not just the poor who want more.

The rich aren't satisfied with their millions, they want to make billions. And the kids growing up in middle class have long assumed that when they get their first job they're going to be making as much as their mom or dad, and that they'll live in a house just like their parents, who worked 20 or 30 years to achieve some modest success.

The current economy is changing that point of view. Many people no longer believe that the next generation will have a better life-style than their parents. And it's making people depressed, and even angry. Part of the problem, I believe, is a sense of entitlement and a lack of gratitude.

We want more, and we don't appreciate what we have. We have been living in a society that believes that more is better, that bigger is better. This is not the time or the place to have the discussion about the merits of capitalism versus socialism, and I am not advocating one or the other. But I do believe that we lose that essential attitude of being grateful if we are driven by greed or entitlement.

Striving to get ahead we have created a lifestyle of stress and anxiety. We have become a driven people who fail to appreciate the blessings that are ours to enjoy. I think it is possible to live with less and to be happier. Many who are poor in our eyes are rich in faith, full of joy and happiness. They have learned to cultivate the attitude of gratitude.

Norman Vincent Peale tells the story of one man who discovered the benefits of being thankful in a sermon he preached called “Give Thanks Every Day.” William Stidger was his name. He was, in his time, one of the most distinctive and persuasive preachers in this country: uniquely different from the ordinary. He was a professor of theology, and by implication, a great scholar. But he also had, to a marked degree, that special quality known as the human touch. Dr. Peale became interested in his personality and interviewed him to learn more.

At one time, he learned, Bill Stidger had a nervous breakdown. For months he sat in gloom and mental darkness. He told Dr. Peale “I cared for nothing about anything. Everything was hopeless, everything was dark, everything was black. I was utterly despondent.” It sounds like a classic description of clinical depression.

And how did he emerge from this? By practicing the art of thanksgiving. One day, a friend told him that with God’s help, he could bring himself out of his despondency. “Think,” his friend told him, “of people who have greatly benefitted you in your life, and ask yourself whether you have ever thanked them.”

“I can think of many right now, but I don’t remember thanking any of them,” Stidger said. “Well,” his friend suggested, “why don’t you choose one of them and write that person a letter of thanks?”

Stidger gave it some thought, and then he remembered an old school teacher. He hadn’t communicated with her in years, but he began to think about her. And he remembered the gift she had, of being able to inspire her students. It was she who had given him an appreciation of literature and made him love the great poets.

So, he sat down and wrote her a letter, telling her that her influence had been a great blessing to him, and that he had never forgotten her. He wrote that he wanted to thank her for what she had done for him.

He received a letter in reply, a letter written in the shaky handwriting of an elderly lady. “Dear Willy,” she wrote, addressing him by his boyhood nickname. “When I read your letter, I was blinded by tears, for I remember you, and as I think of you now, I see you as a little fellow in my class. You have warmed my heart.” She continued: “I taught school for 50 years. Yours is the first letter of thanks I have ever received from a student, and I shall cherish it until I die.”

This brought a ray of sunshine into Stidger’s mind, and encouraged him to try another letter of appreciation., and another, and another. Until he had written 500 such letters. In the years that followed, whenever depression would start to come upon him, he would take out his copies of the letters of thanks he had written to people, and the happiness he had experienced doing it would well up in his heart again.

A great antidote to a heavy heart, is giving thanks. It’s also the corrective we need in a society that is addicted to more. Being thankful for the blessings already ours. And did you notice that saying thanks to others was a two-fold gift for Bill Stidger. Not only was the person who got the letter lifted up, so was he.

This thanksgiving, let’s reach out to others, sharing the love and the gratitude. We can do something for someone else who has less than we do, sharing the blessings we have been given. We can also make a phone call, or write a letter, to someone in our life who has made an impact on us, just to let them know. Just to say “thanks.”

Six year old Aaron asked his mother what was for dinner. “Chicken soup,” answered his mom. “My favorite food. Thank God!” said Aaron excitedly. “Why are you thanking God?” his mother wanted to know. “I made the chicken soup.” “Yeah,” said Aaron, “but God made the chicken.”

Every Sunday we sing the doxology. But do we ever stop to think of what the words mean. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." What if we made it a daily prayer? What if we began to look for all of those blessings, and to give God thanks for each one of them, each and every day? Thanksgiving is not merely a holiday, it is a way of life. Let us give thanks, every day. Amen? Amen!!