

Community Church of Issaquah

November 20, 2022

Steps to a Thankful Life

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Standing in line at a store recently, I was behind a mother and her young pre-school daughter. When the cashier, in an effort to be kind to the child, offered her a sticker, the little girl lit up like a Christmas tree. She took the princess sticker, put it on her hand and began to stare at it. Her mother said, "Can you say thank you?" But the little girl didn't look up or speak, so her mother kept repeating, "Say thank you." Interestingly, the little girl never said a word.

I'd be willing to bet that each of us at some point in our lives were instructed just like that child. We were likely taught that among other words and deeds, these would make us polite. I would like to think that I was a good learner from my mother. It's my habit to say thanks for even small deeds. That would be what we call, "good manners." In reality, that isn't practiced as often these days with younger generations. I'll use my grandson as an example.

He was married last year and asked me to "anoint" his wedding. He meant officiate, but was a bit confused about terminology. So grandpa drove the 8 hours to Missoula, Montana, did my job as the officiant in the rehearsal and ceremony, and drove the 8 hours back home. I don't think he and his new wife knew that ministers are usually compensated for their work, and I certainly did not want or

expect them to do that. I did hope that at some point in all the planning and ceremony he would offer a word of thanks or even send a text – the way his generation communicates. That however, never happened until his mom scolded him and shamed him into a note. No text, no email, no written note, not phone call. Just silence until he was told to say “thank you.” It seems evident that he didn’t grasp the art of good manners. Now don’t get me wrong. I love my grandson and he is a remarkable young man. He just hasn’t learned the lessons of good manners yet. We’ll wait until he has a child of his own and see what that brings.

Here on the edge of Thanksgiving, perhaps we all should spend a few minutes thinking about the difference between good manners and gratitude – between simply saying “thank you” and being thankful. Let me see if I can help in that reflection with a few steps to becoming more aware of our thankful lives. We’ll use the story of the ten lepers as our jumping off place, if you will.

Luke tells a remarkable story about an encounter Jesus had with ten men who were victims of a horrific disease called leprosy. Whenever anyone had that disease, they were forced outside of society and offered no help or contact with anyone, even family. So, these verses in Luke are eye-opening in so many ways. These 10 men broke with tradition and approached Jesus as he was near them, something they were never supposed to do. And there, from a short distance, they called out to him for healing. Jesus’s reputation as a healer must have become widely known if these ten men knew who he was and what he could do.

Their cry was passionate, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” There’s a painful tug on our own hearts as we read those words, knowing that these lepers had no other hope. Where others to whom these men called out to would have pushed them away and would have called them “unclean,” Jesus simply said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” That’s a far different response than those who claimed to have healing powers and would have yelled. Remember hearing “Be healed!”? But for Jesus, it was a few simple words of instruction. “Go. Show.”

When the men turned to make their way to see the priests or leaders at the temple, they noticed that they had been healed, or as Luke calls it, “cleansed.” Can you imagine their excitement? Now they would be able to go back into society, to be with people, to live again. As they moved away from where Jesus had been, only one of them turned back and fell on his face and gave thanks to Jesus. Oddly enough, the one who turned back was a Samaritan or foreigner, not a Jew. “Were there not ten cleansed?” Jesus asked. Turning to the one who came in thanks, Jesus said, “Get up and go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

Though on the outside this experience seems more like learning good manners to say thank you, there is a depth of meaning all of us can learn. For me, I see some valuable life lessons in this story that might help us move more toward thankfulness. Here are three things to consider. Steps to a thankful life.

First, stop. When the lepers saw what had happened in their cleansing or healing, they began to walk away, headed to see the priests. But one man stopped, realizing that Jesus had changed his life – actually spared his life. His response was to stop and turn from the group, returning to Jesus.

Perhaps there is a need in our own lives to stop and realize what God has done for us. Certainly, none of us have been in the same outcast situation as being a leper, but each of us has had life experiences that leave us feeling we were in desperate need of a healing hand. At the same time, many of us have been so blessed in so many ways that we sometimes fail to stop and see what God has done for us. Do you need to stop today? I do.

The second lesson is to look. Once you've stopped, take a good look at your life and see exactly what your life in Christ has meant for you. You know the old hymn, "Count your blessings, name them one by one; count your blessings see what God has done." Look around you in this service and see the people God has blessed you with. Look at where you are in life and what you have. Maybe we have some health issues. Maybe we don't have the wealth Elon Musk. Maybe our world isn't the perfect place we'd like. But let me ask, what do you see in your own life when you stop and look?

The last lesson for us is to listen. What does God want us to learn from stories like this one regarding one thankful person in a host of ten. The Samaritan turned from going to the priest and instead came back to Jesus, not just to

thank him, but to learn from him. There's no doubt in my mind that this former leper wanted to know more of this Jesus who had healed him. He wanted to listen. For us, this is often hard. There are so many distractions that keep us from focusing on what is important. We get busy; we can't find enough time; we're unclear about our abilities to make things happen.

This Thanksgiving, it seems important that we stop for a few minutes, look at what blessings we have, and then listen to what comes to mind about what God wants us to learn from His presence in our lives. My hope is that once we have done this, we'll really know what thankfulness is. There is a meaning to thankfulness that is deeper than just a simple, "Thanks, God."

Let me borrow this Thanksgiving Prayer from another minister, Thomas Fischer. It goes like this:

Dear God:

I want to thank you for what you have already done.
I am not going to wait until I see results or receive rewards.

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until I feel better or things look better,

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until people say they are sorry or until they stop talking about me,

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until the pain in my body disappears,

I am thanking you right now.
I am not going to wait until my financial situation improves,
I'm going to thank you right now.
I am not going to wait until the house is quiet,
I am going to thank you right now.
I am not going to wait until I understand every experience in my life that has caused me pain or grief,
I am going to thank you right now.
I am not going to wait until the journey gets easier or the challenges are removed,
I am thanking you right now.
I am thanking you because I am alive.
I am thanking you because I made it through the day's difficulties.
I am thanking you because I have walked around the obstacles.
I am thanking you because I have the ability and the opportunity to do more and do better.
I am thanking you because you have not given up on me.
God, thank you for being so good to me.
In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

May we all have a blessed Thanksgiving and may we all find a time to fill our hearts with thankfulness.