

Thanksgiving Sunday Prayers Sunday October 11 2020

Celebrations

10th Yesterday Joanne O'Drowsky

11th Dan Dale

11th Rona Wilson (70)

Anniversary

12th Dianne and Denny O'Brien

15th Vera and Ray Mrtin 65th

Congregational Concerns

Friends and family of the late Marietta
Roberts
Rust & Marfleet Families
Rev. Brian & Dianne Sherry & family
The Rust Family & Family of Janet Marfleet
Family of Fern Jameson Pell
Mary Joan
Ellen Brekelmans & the de Gouw family
Cathy Tredenick
Vince Melvin
Jason Carnegie
Milt Springer

The Cannady's
The Hartford family
Marilyn Cartwright
Carol Maes
Sally Paul
Rae Axford
Judy Jacklin
Betty Graham
Marilyn Smith
Ralf family & the family of the late
Branden Pettit
Jean Lammiman

A Pastoral Prayer for Thanksgiving

It's Thanksgiving Weekend, God, and as we have done before, we come to you with words of thanks for all the blessings which we have received. Like the ancient Hebrews with Moses we may think we have reasons to complain and grumble. For life as we knew it, even wiits steep challenges changed big time because of the global pandemic. But like those wandering people, life is challenging us to lean more upon our faith in you. We depend upon your grace to sustain us, your love to forgive us and your righteousness to guide us.

Thank you for being our constant and compass as we move through an everchanging landscape. In this season of harvest and Thanksgiving, help us to see blessing in abundance all around us.

Open our eyes to see blessing in the brilliant and subdued multi-colored hues of the autumn leaves. Open our ears to hear blessing in those who cheerfully greet us with waves and smiling eyes twinkling at us over the face coverings worn to protect us.

Open our hearts to feel blessing as we listen to favorite songs or watch YouTube church, or share Zoom Bible studies with friends.

Open our hands to give blessings as we prepare meals for our families, as we help children with their online schoolwork. as we send our front line family member off to work with a cheery word

of encouragement, as we drop off a few groceries at the home of a shut-in neighbor. Thank you, God for all your many blessings, seen and unseen, acknowledged or unacknowledged by us. Thank you, God for the blessing of community and a shared faith. We are grateful for our church family and for 190 years of continuous ministry. We ask your blessing upon us as we travel through the wilderness of pandemic separately but together, united in a spirit of hope and unity, bound together by the love of Jesus, our leader.

Receive our prayers for those named on our prayer list and for others whose troubles are known only to us. May they sense your grace surrounding them. May they feel held up and embraced by love as they travel through dark and scary valleys.

May your Holy Spirit bring a measure of courage and peace that they can only receive from you. We thank you, O God for the blessing of living in these times.

We praise you for the blessings of medical and scientific advancements, and for the world wide web that in this pandemic is a lifeline for many people and businesses.

We praise you for our leaders who have our backs and for citizens who protest and vote and lend their voices to keep them and all of us accountable and responsible. We praise you most of all for your love, expressed in Creation and in loving relationships and in all the small and big blessings of our lives. Your great love for us is shown most profoundly and personally in Jesus Christ, our Savior, Friend and Brother. By his life of self-less giving he showed us that serving the needs of others, especially the most vulnerable can be life-changing both for them and for us. And by blessing others, we also bring joy and blessing to your loving heart.

May the words of our mouths, meditations of our hearts and the works of our hands bring blessing upon you, loving God, Giver of life in all its abundance! Amen

Gospel Luke 17: 11-19

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Thanksgiving Sunday Sermon Sunday, October 11, 2020

Scripture: Luke 17: 11-19

Sermon: THANKSGIVING IN THE PLACE-BETWEEN

Thanksgiving looks different this year. The traditional gathering of family and friends has been trimmed along with the turkey. Adult children must gather around laptops or Ipads to share virtual meals with their parents and grandparents. Indoor festivities may be moved outdoors, weather permitting.

Visits to family members in care facilities are largely curtailed. This tweaking of beloved traditions, as annoying as it may be, is meant to protect us from a virus that cares nothing about us or our traditions, including thanksgiving.

Circumstances which are beyond our control forces us to adapt, be creative to mark the occasion as best we can. We've been doing this for 8 months. Have we been doing it with thankful hearts?

Thanksgiving may look different this year for reasons other than the pandemic. For many people, this season brings with it not only dying leaves and empty fields, but also feelings of deep loss and inner emptiness. Illness, accident, injury and death are no respecters of holidays. Indeed, when troubles fall on or near a special day, whether it is a birthday or a festive holiday the meaning of that day is forever altered.

Perhaps our propensity of being thankful depends in part on our personality. Would you call yourself a glass half- full or a glass half- empty kind of person? *Glass half -full* folks are quick to find the silver lining in the cloud. *Glass half-empty* folks find it harder to see anything but the storm cloud. They may eventually find the silver lining, but it takes more time and effort to get there.

The pandemic has spawned a flood of negatives, more than enough to keep the glass half-empty folks occupied. It has changed our celebrations and shut down churches and created economic and mental hardship for millions. But it has also contributed to opening people's minds, hearts and hands. "We are all in this together" is more than a catch phrase. It is a mantra for the whole of creation on this Earth right now.

In an attempt to be a glass-half full kind person, may I suggest a positive way that Thanksgiving can look different this year? Think of Thanksgiving as seeming different because its been happening in a variety of ways during the course of past 8 months.. The pandemic, especially in the first few weeks, inspired countless numbers of folks to pause and take notice of blessings previously taken for granted, or ignored in the daily crazy-busy- ness of living. Have you noticed that you've been more aware of the ordinary simple pleasures around you? Have you caught yourself thinking of people you haven't contacted for awhile. Have you appreciated moments of connection with family and friends even more, now that they are more rare or must happen virtually rather than in person?

The pandemic has awakened us to notice people who may not be inside the bubble, but are so essential to our well-being. With new appreciation we found ourselves thanking grocery clerks and waving at the garbage collectors. We are learning the names of the staff at nursing homes who care for our loved ones. We are buying Timmies treats for the transport truck driver standing in line behind us. Social distancing has prompted impromptu serenades outside windows and drive by parades, like the one we're holding next Sunday for our church's 190th Anniversary.

Before Covid 19 struck can you ever remember a time when people stood on balconies to bang pots and play violins as a show of thanking first responders? This is the first in my lifetime that scientists and medical officers of health are being treated like rock stars.

Messages of gratitude writ large and proud have greeted us at bus stops, on store fronts and from the windows of private homes. Recently I met my young neighbour who had chalked the

inspiring sidewalk messages that I've shared with you in previous emails. I told her that I had found her messages inspiring and had shared them with my church family. Her face lit up with a radiant smile, "Thank you so much!" she said. My heart swelled with joy to know that I had affirmed her efforts to affirm others.

Let us now consider what is for some of us a very familiar gospel story. It's about a man who remembered to say "Thank you" to Jesus. Perhaps looking at the story from a new perspective, through the lens of our lived pandemic experiences will shine a new light on this ancient story. Whether we are glass half- full or glass - half empty people, God always has something to reveal to us from the Word. And we are thankful!

First, let us see where the story takes place. Luke locates this story in a region that, as Luke describes it, lies *between* Galilee and Samaria. That's kind of a strange statement because the two regions butted up to each other. Maybe you've visited a location along Canada's border where you were able to place one foot on US soil and the other on Canadian soil. Did you know that The Haskel Library & Opera House in Vermont USA has a black line taped along the flooring? The tape marks the official border between Vermont and Quebec. That's what the border was like between Galilee and Samaria, but without a black line.

With this location, Luke is telling us that Jesus and his disciples were out in the boonies. One of the commentators of this passage called it a *place-between*. It was largely uninhabited, except for snakes, lizards, and, as it turned out, a handful of discarded human beings. Sometimes the physical distancing can make us feel out of sorts. It feels so abnormal, like we're living in a *place-between*.

But the good news in the story is that Jesus was not stranger to the 'place-between' places. Luke tells us that he was traveling through that no-man's land along the Galilee -Samaria border. He did not do what Galileans usually did, which was take the longer route around it. Jesus was not afraid of the place-between. Maybe he anticipated that there just might be somebody out there in that desolate place; someone who might be in need of a Saviour. If that is what Jesus was thinking, he was right! Ten men who were afflicted by a potentially deadly skin disorder that Luke tells us was leprosy approached Jesus in that lonesome place.

The disease Luke called leprosy was not the same disease that people are diagnosed with today. But the skin disease they had was debilitating and disfiguring. It eventually would bring about their demise. Next to nothing was known about the source of disease back then, so diseases were seen as signs of God's disfavor for sins people or their ancestors had committed. So, people with illnesses were banned from their places of worship. People living with leprosy were forced to leave their homes, jobs and villages to live apart as homeless outcasts. Even though they were believed to be cursed by God for something they did, their condition was feared as being contagious. So they were sent away from civilization to die. And that's why the 10 leprous men appeared in the outback. This place was their home. This place would be their cemetery, if they could not get well.

As we think of the sick men, we can identify with their suffering but also with the fear and anxiety of a society who fears contagion. Over the weeks and months Canadians have learned the rules of preventing the spread of the virus. Wear face coverings in public spaces, keep 6 feet apart, wash our hands often, avoid prolonged exposure to large gatherings. The 10 sick men did

not have hospitals, research labs, scientists, or political leaders who felt responsible for their care. All they had were superstitions, fear, the teachings of their faith and rules meant to protect society from the curse which they embodied.

These 10 men knew the rules of their disease, like having to shout something like: STAND BACK! They were required to announce their presence from afar in order to alert people that they were in the vicinity.

Sometime during the past 8 months have you been admonished by a stranger standing near you in line in a store that you're standing too close? How did it make you feel? Awkward, embarrassed, apologetic? annoyed? Compare your minute of discomfort what these men had to endure from others every minute of every day of every month of every year.

Have you been awakened at mid-night by the amber alert screaming on your cell phone to tell you of a child abduction? It's alarming and unnerving to be awakened by that siren, calling for help. These men living with leprosy had to scream out an alert whenever they came near people. How humiliating it must have been for them, and startling to the hearers.

“Keeping their distance”, Luke tells us, “they called out to Jesus, saying, ‘Jesus, have mercy on us!’” Remember that these sick men were nobodies, they were outcasts, avoided. invisible and scary to people to whom they got close enough to yell , “Stand Back!” As they called out to Jesus, it says that Jesus *saw* them. Take note that Jesus didn't just *hear* them and their cries but he saw them, too.

Jesus saw the 10 sick men, Luke says. What Luke doesn't say is that seeing them likely broke Jesus heart. We as a society are starting to see individuals and groups previously or presently treated as invisible or second class with new eyes. Think of persons with special needs, indigenous peoples, black people, people with mental health issues, LGBTQ+, elderly folks, homeless youth, women, migrant workers and refugees. The pandemic and subsequent unrest highlighted the voices and issues of marginal or underrepresented folks. When they are seen, and when hearts start to break, then real change will happen.

Jesus *saw* the ten sick men. His heart broke. And then he spoke. “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And because they were practiced at obeying rules, they did just what they were told. They turned and headed for the nearest town. They didn't even stop long enough to look down at their fingers and toes to see if anything had changed. I think they just knew.

To this point, this story is similar to other healing stories involving Jesus. But here it takes a surprising twist. One of the men stops in his tracks, spins round, and races back to Jesus to thank him. In my mind's eye I see that Jesus can hear him before he sees him coming over the ridge. Jesus hears a voice trained from years of shouting floats and echoes, shouting life into the desolate place-between. He's praising God at the top of his lungs! He runs up to Jesus and collapses at his feet; his chest heaving without pain, his legs trembling with new muscles unused to exertion. The one who returned to praise God and thank Jesus for answering his prayers was a Samaritan.

Jesus is amazed at this man for at least two reasons. First, he's amazed that the Samaritan, a foreigner, one who is supposed to be the cultural and religious enemy of the Jews, returned thank him; a Jew, and that he understood that God had given him this miracle.

Secondly, he is amazed that the other nine (who both Jesus, and Luke presumes, were Jews) did not return to say thanks. Hopefully they were grateful and only distracted by relief and a desire to see their families. Maybe some or all later paused to say a heart-felt thank you to God.

But they also missed or ignored or failed to *see* Jesus as more than a faith healer, as more than a magician. They missed seeing the connection that he had with God and with them. John puts it this way in his gospel: *The Word was God and the Word became flesh and lived among us, filled with grace and truth.* The 9 men also missed the opportunity to be a blessing to Jesus by offering their gratitude. They missed making his heart swell and his lips smile with joy.

Doesn't it enrich your spirit; doesn't it cheer your soul when someone takes the time to express sincere thanks to you? Maybe you received a thank you card recently in the mail or a thank you heart emoji in a Facebook message. I've already mentioned my conversation with the neighbor girl who wrote hopeful chalk messages. This past Friday, I received flowers for Thanksgiving from Barb on behalf of my church family. The card reads, "*Margie, In appreciation for our favourite 'clergy-person, Love and hugs, your Plains Family.*" Sisters and brothers, my heart swells, my lips smile in my **Thanks to you.**

And so it was that a Samaritan man healed by Jesus, praised God and thanked God's son for saving his life. That man in turn was sent on his way with wonderful words of affirmation ringing, not like an alarm but like angels' voices in his soul. "Get up and go your way. Your *faith* has made you well." *Your* faith has made *you* well. Your faith has made *you* well.

Thanksgiving looks different this year. God's love is always wherever we are, forgiving, sustaining, comforting, encouraging, working to bring us to a place of wholeness and gratitude.

The Premier directed Ontarians to keep the Thanksgiving celebrations very small. "Have your turkey dinner with the people you live with," he said. Even though Covid may be keeping us at least 2 metres apart, neither it nor any human made rules can ever separate us from God. I'm so grateful for that promise of Christ's presence, in the places-between, and anywhere that I find myself.

Will you say a heart felt thank you to God for the blessings you've received even in this strange pandemic season? One way you can show your thanks to God is by paying it forward to someone else. Who is it, whether inside or outside of your Thanksgiving Bubble that could use a word or gesture of thanks?

Maybe he or she is going to be with you at your trimmed down Thanksgiving feast. Give the gift that keeps on giving! For when you say thank you, you give a blessing and you receive one for yourself. And I'm not talking about the glass half-full or a glass half empty kind of blessing, but the *cup running over* kind. Thanks be to God!

