

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Thanksgiving Continues"  
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Thanksgiving continues...in more ways than just learning new recipes for the leftover turkey you have. I hope you'll be happy to know that this idea of lengthening the Thanksgiving season is beginning to catch on. Some across Canada through our electronic connections are agreeing that an elongated time of Thanksgiving would be good both spiritually and culturally. Some now argue that the season should go between Canadian Thanksgiving and American Thanksgiving. So if we begin with the blueberry harvest here and end with the last week of November, that might make Thanksgiving one of our major seasons, rather than just the "ordinary" time it is described as in our Revised Common Lectionary.

And if we were to take that long a time for thinking about what we can thank God for, then perhaps it might become more of a habit for all of us, all the time. As Ephesians 5:20 says: always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For a thankful heart, like a cheerful one, is good medicine. (Proverbs 17:22) This is what Jesus looks for in the ones whom he encounters in a village in that religious no man's land between Samaria and Israel in Luke 17. A respectable person wouldn't be there in the first place, and so it's no wonder that those with what was considered a communicable disease encountered the Lord there at a distance. Some of us like to keep our distance as well from Jesus. We are afraid of what He might say to us, or ask us to do. I remember a friend telling me he was so afraid that God would ask Him to go somewhere He didn't want to go...far away, away from the conveniences of home, away from the comforts. His fears kept him at a distance from Jesus, and kept him from deeper relationship with Him. But Jesus has your best in mind, don't fear getting closer to Him.

We can see this in the fact that Jesus didn't put off the lepers who called out to Him. He didn't tell them to go away. He asked them to do what the Scriptures in Leviticus 13 required a person to do when they have a skin disease, and that was to see the priest to make sure they were cured. So what was Jesus asking these men to do? First, to risk believing what he said was necessary and true. Second, to risk actually doing what Jesus said for

them to do. Third, be thankful. But many of us stop at step number one. We have to risk trusting Jesus. Is there something in your life God is calling you to do? Are you willing to trust Jesus for the resources, for the boldness to do what He is asking you to do? Whether it is sharing about how God is real in your life, or whether it is moving far away or even moving back home, or studying more, or no longer studying, in relationships talking about the difference God makes in your life, whatever it is...will you risk it?

We don't know what these men went through in the middle of verse 14 of Luke 17. We don't know if they had a crisis of faith or doubt or simple apathy. All we do know is that they were desperate enough to risk trusting Jesus and then acted on what He said. And as a result, all ten were healed.

Now we know that only ten percent came back to say "thank you." Jesus knew that nine tenths would not say thank you, but he didn't take back any healing. There are many levels of healing and many kinds.

You may not know that the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship that we use for Communion, Baptisms, Funerals, Marriage and regular Sunday worship also contains a section called, "Ministry to Persons who are Sick or Confined." In that section, there are Scriptural and Prayer resources, but also services of anointing with oil and the laying on of hands. There are many parts of Scripture that encourage this ministry, perhaps the best known is James 5: 14: Is any one of you sick? He or she should call the elders of the church to pray over him or her and anoint him or her with oil in the name of the Lord. And the result is given in verse 15: And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him or her up. If she or he has sinned, she or he will be forgiven. Verse 16 completes the context: Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

I bring this passage to the foreground simply to note that it involves risk to ask someone to pray for you, for anything, let alone for healing of something in your life, whether physical or otherwise. It takes courage to simply ask. Because what it involves is an intimate agreement before God for a person's health. Sometimes God will miraculously heal. I have seen it. I have seen a man who was on the floor of his living room because of his back problems be healed and basically be able to work again. I know a man who has had terrible migraines and would lose two days work about every three weeks due to this debilitating condition. He was freed from the severity and

interval of the migraines through healing prayer. Others have been released from the bondage of the memories and trauma of some assault against them as children and adults. Others have been released from addictions, serious life threatening addictions.

All of this is simply to say, I am open to praying for healing and leaving the results to God. It is not my experience that every time we pray, we receive the healing we desire. Nevertheless, we do not come to God demanding health rights, but rather asking in line with what the Scripture tells us and in line with what Jesus did, even for those who were not so thankful in the end.

I'm sure there are some elders here who would join me in praying for you or for someone else, if they were in agreement with receiving healing prayer. Sometimes I used to think that it was only the Pentecostals or some other more demonstrative group or some individual on TV who would minister with healing prayer. But let me assure you that Presbyterians do this as many Christians do in many denominations and non-denominations. The risk then comes simply in asking.

It may not even be healing prayer that God is asking challenging you to ask for, but a simple prayer to agree with you for God's best in your life, and committing or recommitting yourself to the fullness of relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Knowing for certain that you have a relationship with Christ brings healing. As I said, there are many levels of healing. I believe simply choosing to be more thankful also can lead to levels of healing and health.

And may I also add that none of this is in competition with the medical profession nor the medical system. I often ask for wisdom for the medical practitioners while I am in hospital with patients. This is never an either/or situation. Healing prayer is meant to be in the area of our health, what prayer to commit all to Jesus is in every other area of our life.

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:18) This can be difficult particularly as one faces a chronic illness. I don't think God is asking us to thank him for the disease or for the sin we have suffered at another's hands. I believe it means looking for what we can celebrate while we have the breath of life in us. Because this is a choice we each face every day.

Thanksgiving can be a complicated choice mixed with the reality of our accepting and grieving our losses. But even such grief can be shouldered by the One who was intimately acquainted with grief and who desires to bear our burdens and sorrows.

As Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (KJV)

And so our thanksgiving leads us to risk finding out what God will do for us in our relationship to Him, and what he is calling us to do for Him. These things reveal the intimacy of trust and the wonder of grace.

Let us pray.