

Giving Thanks Thanksgiving Sunday – 11 October 2020

For many years, when I was at St. Peter's Dorchester, at Thanksgiving, I would take my last week of vacation and go to the Parish of the Bruce Peninsula (what is now Lutheran and Anglican Ministries of the Bruce Peninsula or LAMB). I would stay in a little cottage attached to St. Edmund's Anglican Church in Tobermory. I would arrive on Saturday afternoon, unpack the car, hang up my vestments, go for a walk to the Ferry dock and watch the world go by. Just before sunset I would go into the Church and preach my sermon for Sunday to adjust for the acoustics and further ground myself.

Sunday morning I would rise early and get showered and dressed, head over to the Church and greet folks as they arrived. I would see many familiar faces, some visitors, and some friends. It always felt like a kind of homecoming, being in Tobermory for Thanksgiving.

I've been living in British Columbia for 4 1/2 years. It will be five years at the end of January 2021. One of the things for which I am grateful is Creation. Whenever I am feeling stress, a walk in the woods, where I can see sky and hear water set me at ease. The Bruce peninsula is a heavily forested area and is surrounded by water. It is an area that could be considered a "thin place"; a place where the realm surrounding this life and the next is very thin.

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus is traveling between the communities of Samaria and Galilee when he comes across ten lepers. In those days leprosy was considered any skin condition which caused discoloration or disfigurement. What we know as eczema may have been considered leprosy in Jesus' day. Those who were inflicted with leprosy were outcasts of the community as they were considered highly contagious and further, that their leprosy was the result of sin. Their leprosy was a curse from God for something they, or their parents had done. They had to ring bells to draw attention to themselves to ensure they did not infect anyone else. They would ring their bells and shout "unclean", and as they were unable to work, they depended on strangers and begged for food, shelter and clothing. Lepers were feared by most everyone. Leprosy, unlike most of society, did not discriminate.

Leprosy today is known as Hansen's disease and it a viral infection, which is difficult to diagnose and treat. However, it is almost eradicated in the world today.

Back in Jesus' day, if you had leprosy, your social life was over. You were outcast and would be for the rest of your life. The lepers would go to the priests for food and help and ask for prayers for healing.

The ten lepers had heard Jesus was traveling and when they found him, they announced themselves by ringing their bells. Then they begged Jesus for healing and mercy. And so, Jesus being the son of God and what have you, healed the lepers. He told them to go and show themselves to their priests. They all stood, healed, and ran to tell their priests. Except one. When he realised he was healed he returned to Jesus and prostrated himself at Jesus feet.

He literally threw himself on the ground, face first, and gave thanks to God through Jesus, for his cure.

Jesus reaction is quite interesting. He does not speak directly to the healed man, but to his apostles and the crowd that have witnessed this scene.

Jesus says "were there not ten who were made clean? And yet only one has returned to give thanks". THEN he addresses the one man and says "get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well."

Now, there were ten men who had leprosy who approached Jesus as he entered the village. We don't know if they were traveling together or if they came upon each other. Likely they were traveling together as it would be only way they could find companionship. They were all outcasts, regardless of where they had lived previously.

One of the men was a Samaritan. Which means he came from the area of Samaria. Jesus was not a fan of the Samaritans. Samaritans, as a whole, kept to themselves. Historically they had been treated poorly by the Jews and as Jesus was a Jew, there was some tension and, dare I say, dislike.

We often think of Jesus as someone who was faultless. Someone who had no biases. Someone who never lost his temper. And yet, all three of those things are false.

Jesus has faults because he was human. He discriminated against Samaritans. He had likely been raised to be weary of them, and he showed his biases, especially in the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus lost his temper on a few occasions. The one that is likely the best known is when he turned over the tables in the temple and made a whip of cords to send the money-changers running.

Remember, Jesus was fully-divine AND fully-human. So this man that Jesus does not like, comes with nine other men asking for mercy and healing. Jesus heals all of them, and they run off to tell their priests. But one, the Samaritan, comes back first to say thank you.

Why him?

Why not the other nine?

There's a lot of scholarship written on this. But at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter what anyone else thinks. The main focus here is the Samaritan. The one who didn't believe the same things as Jesus. The one who worshipped differently than Jesus came back to say thank you.

Now, we could say the other nine were going to show themselves to their priests first and would be back to thank Jesus later.

We could say that they didn't need to thank Jesus with their lips because they were thanking God in their hearts.

Honestly? I don't know why they didn't say thank you.
If they had, would the Samaritan man's thanks have meant as much? I don't know.

What I do know is we live in a time when the extended stress and fear of this pandemic is exacerbating mental health. We see people growing wary of each other. We see people disregarding the rules. Look at how the numbers are climbing in Ontario and some of the pandemic rules are being rolled back, such as dine-in restaurants and bars.

For many people, Thanksgiving is a time synonymous with family, especially traveling to visit with family or family visiting you. And this year, for most of us, that isn't happening. Which, frankly, sucks.

We have a choice. We can choose to focus on that which we don't have, or focus on that which we do. My family won't be with me in person, but I can see them on Zoom. I can't cook dinner for a dozen people because they aren't in my bubble, but I can set the table with my best linens and cook a simple dinner for myself.

I can't go to Tobermory this year, but I can still take a walk by the river. Even if I have to wear my snowshoes to do it.

It comes down to perspective. Sometimes we need the time to throw ourselves a small pity-party. Then we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and have another piece of pumpkin pie or some brussels sprouts. But not at the same time. Gross.

I received many photos of people and things for which we are thankful. I'm going to share those with you (online) shortly.

I'm very thankful for you. I'm thankful for our first of hopefully many years of shared ministry. I'm thankful for learning to worship and connect with a community, in a way I never would have imagined a year ago.

And most of all, I'm thankful to God. I'm thankful for the love of something much greater than myself, whose love is unconditional. For someone who loves me, even when I cannot love myself. Thanks be to God for all the blessings of this life. Small and large. Animal, vegetable and mineral. And everything in between.

Thanks be to God.

The Reverend Andrea L. Brennan
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Luke 17.11-19