

October 8, 2017 – An Attitude of Gratitude

Luke 17:11-19

Like you, I awoke on Monday to the horrific news of the mass shooting in Las Vegas. During the rest of the week our news continued to be filled with more and more details about this tragic event, only to have the headlines taken over in the last couple of days by the anticipation of Nate, yet another deadly hurricane. I had to ask myself, "In the midst of such tragedy how was I to celebrate a day of Thanksgiving; how were we to celebrate a day set aside for gratitude?"

I guess the question could also be asked in this way, "When is gratitude appropriate?" Well we know that gratitude is an appropriate response when something good happens. For instance, let's take a look at today's scripture reading. In this reading Jesus healed ten lepers.

In Jesus' day the word leper was used for people who suffered from various skin diseases. The diseases were often contagious so these unfortunate people were shunned by their communities and forced to live away from their families and their friends. They lived lives of isolation and poverty. So when those ten lepers stood at a distance and shouted, "Jesus, Rabbi, have pity on us," Jesus responded by telling them to go and show themselves to the priest. You see it was the priest who had the power to pronounce them healed. And it was as they went on their way that they were healed.

So how did those lepers respond? They were all, no doubt, surprised when they realized they were healed. Some may even have been overjoyed. Perhaps a few celebrated their good fortune. Maybe some took it for granted. We don't really know. All we do know is that one leper not only felt thankful but decided to actually give voice to his emotions. One chose to go back and express his gratitude to Jesus.

And Jesus rightly responded, "Weren't all ten made whole? Where are the other nine? Yes, gratitude is an appropriate response when good things happen in our lives, but even then it is a choice. It is a choice to see the blessings that we receive, to name them and then to express our gratitude for them. Only one of the lepers in today's story made that particular choice.

In our lives we have reasons for gratitude and also reasons for fear, for anger, for frustration, grief and regret. This past week our news was filled with stories of pain and suffering and even though we were not directly impacted by these distant events, many of us found ourselves feeling vulnerable and even afraid. We realized those people who died in Las Vegas were no different than us. It could have been someone we knew at that concert. With all the tragedy in our world, it would be easy to be overwhelmed with feelings of fear or sadness. But we usually have the ability to choose how much time we grant to each of our emotions.

Doctors, therapists, and theologians alike will tell you that one of the best things that you can do for your health is to nurture an “attitude of gratitude.” When is gratitude appropriate? The answer is always. Even when life isn’t going the way we expected, we can still be grateful for life itself. We don’t have to wait for amazing or wonderful things to happen in order to be grateful.

It is all a matter of attitude or perspective. Let’s take for example this province in which we live. I can tell you as someone who grew up in Ontario, that for many people in this country, Saskatchewan is just a province that you have to drive through in order to get to the mountains. It’s a flat and boring place that takes most of a day to get across. This was my attitude until I came to live here.

Now I love this beautiful prairie and give thanks for it every day. On Friday I was hiking at Saskatchewan Landing and took the picture that you see on the screens in front of you. It is the view from the top of a coulee on the south west side of the valley. Some of you may even recognize the large rock that fills much of the picture. When I read the details that my phone had stored with this photo, I smiled to see that it had categorized this image as “mountain.” You see, we don’t really need to go the Alberta after all. How we view our world is just a matter of attitude.

In fact, Dr. Brene Brown, a well-known social worker, researcher and writer argues that in order to develop a consistent attitude of gratitude we need to practice it. (*The Gifts of Imperfection*, page 78). Gratitude is like a muscle that can be

strengthened over time. In her research she found people practicing gratitude by doing gratitude meditations or prayers, creating gratitude art and even stopping during their stressful, busy days to actually say these words out loud, "I am grateful for..." Fill it in with whatever works for you.

As we practice giving thanks and sharing our gratitude, we not only strengthen our gratitude muscle, but we also create an example for others. We create a climate in which it is easier to be grateful. Even the act of being here today, of taking this time to celebrate God's presence and to give thanks and praise can make a difference. In today's world of accusations, excuses, anger and violence, thanksgiving is something that is desperately needed. When we choose to recognize our blessings, and give a voice to our gratitude we affect those around us, and even shape the reality in which we live.