

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C — 9 October 2022

Grace and gratitude

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2 Kings 5.1-3, 7-15c; Psalm 111; 2 Timothy 2.8-16; Luke 17.11-19

The great Swiss theologian Karl Barth once wrote: *Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice an echo, gratitude follows grace like thunder lightning.* The great Anglican divine of the seventeenth century Jeremy Taylor called it 'the voice of the Eucharist: thanksgiving... gratitude.' We have taken a quantum leap in our reading of Luke's gospel. When I last stood before you it was speak about the greed revealed in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man and the resulting isolation both in this world and in the next. Today we see the other side of the coin the undoing of that isolation through gratitude.

During my trip to the UK this year, I spent some time in old haunts, usually marshlands, mudflats and estuaries. I often went out with an armful of stuff, coats, jumpers, field guides, binoculars, maps, fruit, etc., all of which would be dumped in the back seat of the car. We had returned from one of these expeditions and were getting ready to go out to see a cousin when I realised that I hadn't got my wallet. We checked the car, under the seats, in the boot, in the gutter ... nothing. Off we went to dinner but in my mind was elsewhere. Where is that wallet?

The next morning, we were planning our day, when there was a knock at the door and a rather timid looking young woman stood there, holding my wallet. She had found it the day before on the footpath but, because all the addresses were in Australia, she had no idea where it belonged, she had been going door-to-door. I was overjoyed! I didn't really know how to express my appreciation properly, 'thank you very much' hardly seemed enough given my elation! But she seemed pleased that she had been able to help; she was shy, and her English was not strong, and with a smile she left.

Now the finding of my wallet is a weak analogy, it was hardly an experience of the resurrection, which lies at the heart of our thanksgiving ... but I'm sure you will forgive me. The thought of trying to get new credit cards and of the queue at Access Canberra, filled me with dread. I also very quickly moved on, I was busy, and the elation of gratitude soon faded.

True thankfulness of course demands something of us. Christian theology does for gratitude what it has done for love. It should develop our understanding and experience of it as more than just a feeling or emotion but also as a way of acting, a way of living. When Christ asks us to love our enemies we might well say, this is too much, it is after all impossible to *feel* love toward one's enemies is it not? But we can *act* in such a way toward them that reveals God's love. We can accept them as having been made in God's image and refuse to return harm. We might even be able to find ourselves identifying with them and even achieving some empathy.

I'd like to suggest a similar experience of gratitude. There are many situations in life and many experiences for which it would be difficult, if not impossible, to *feel* grateful. But perhaps gratitude is also *a way* of acting, *a way* of living. A way of acting which presumes upon the grace of God. It is the opposite of intolerance and fear, the things that drive our divisions. You don't have to look very far and see that in so many of the issues that beset us today gratitude is missing. Ultimately gratitude is a way of living that never lets go of living in dependence on God's grace. Grace and gratitude.

The reading from the second book of Kings and the gospel passage from Luke are all about gratitude. Unfortunately, the Old Testament passage in the Lectionary does not do justice to the story. Suffice to say that it is a fascinating tale, it relates the story of a gift of healing coming from an unexpected place and person. Elisha required nothing in return, indeed he refused a gift of thanksgiving. In the gospel the roles are reversed. The colony of Lepers believed that Jesus could offer the gift, no surprises, the surprise is that the thanksgiving comes from an unexpected place and person; from a Samaritan. Only one of the ten, in the midst of their elation, turned to give thanks.

It could be argued that ingratitude lies at the heart of the human condition. Rather than rejoicing in what had been given, Adam and Eve fixed their eyes on what more they might have. The Biblical tradition is all about undoing the isolation that it created.

That undoing culminates in the resurrection. The entire gospel narrative is all about renewal, rebirth, resurrection, the Samaritan experienced it today, and earlier on it was the Prodigal Son or the woman who finds the coin or the man who gets a couple of loaves of bread. The theologian James Allison writes: Resurrection is when something appears in our life that has no reference at all to what we feel we need, or deserve, and over which we have no control, no ability to manipulate. Occasionally, we do experience hints of something like this... yes we do, and for these blessings we are grateful and we respond.

Our Eucharist finds its roots in the Jewish *berakah* which we translate as thanksgiving prayer. We see Jesus praying in this way at the feeding of the multitudes and at the Last Supper; expressing dependence upon God. And as Jesus prayed, so did the first Christians. So for us in this Eucharistic tradition thanksgiving is not merely one aspect of our response to God, but *the* way that we respond to the God of Jesus Christ. Like the Samaritan, whose isolation was over, who did not earn his healing and had no control over it, our first response is always first and foremost thanksgiving. Grace and gratitude. Amen.