

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

October, 2019

Proper 23C / Ordinary 28C / Pentecost +18

The readings this week:

- Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 ◦ Psalm 66:1-12
- 2 Timothy 2:8-15 ◦ Luke 17:11-19

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

"I'm grateful."

That was the regular response of a colleague and friend of mine of a few years past to my casual question, "How are you?" It took me by surprise. Not just the first or second time, but almost every time. Eventually, of course, I wasn't so much surprised, as I was struck by the simplicity and power of this statement. It wasn't the answer I expected. Indeed, we usually expect little more than "fine" or "pretty good" or maybe once and a while "great" when we ask this conversational placeholder, "How are you?"

"I'm grateful." My colleague chose her words with care. She wanted to make a point. That gratitude is not only a response to good fortune but also a choice we make. Certainly that's true of the leper in today's Gospel reading. Ten were healed. Ten, no doubt, were surprised at this discovery. Perhaps some were overjoyed. Perhaps some celebrated. Perhaps others ran to tell their family and friends. Perhaps a few even took it for granted. Who knows? What we do know is that one not only felt thankful but decided to actually give voice to those emotions, to express his gratitude to Jesus and to God. Gratitude is indeed a response to the blessings of life, but it is also a choice to see those blessings, name them, and express our gratitude in word and deed.

And giving voice to gratitude a choice with consequences, for as we express our gratitude, we affect those around us, even shape the reality in which we live.

Think about it. Gratitude is not the only emotion we might choose to express in response to the events of any given day. There are reasons for gratitude, yes, and also reasons for fear, for anger, for frustration, grief, for regret, for apprehension. Each and all of these colors our experience, makes its appearance on the stage of our lives, and perhaps each has a place and role to play from time to time. But we choose how much stage time to grant each of these emotions by giving them expression, and as we do so we give them power in our lives.

And that's what's key: we are making choices. We may feel a range of emotions to all kinds of circumstances and situations, but we choose which to give expression. When confronted by someone who is angry, do we respond with anger as a form of self protection or do we choose empathy, trying to understand the emotions of the other, and gratitude that the person was willing to be honest? When we are set back in some endeavor at school or work, do we express frustration or a resolve to keep at it and gratitude for what

we've learned through this setback? These are choices.

Because here's the thing: gratitude, like all of our other options, becomes easier to choose as we practice it. Gratitude, like faith and hope and love and commitment, are not inborn traits that some have and others don't, but rather gratitude is more like a muscle that can be strengthened over time. And as you practice giving thanks and more frequently share your gratitude, you not only grow in gratitude but create an example for others. More than that, you create a climate in which it is easier to be grateful and encourage those around you to see the blessings all around us.

"I'm grateful." Take a moment to scan the headlines and you'll see how scarce – and how desperately needed – more expressions of gratitude are. Accusation, excuses, venting anger – these seem to have hold of our culture. Indeed, we seem to live in the age of complaint, whether shared in person or increasingly through the venue of social media. What a powerful response gratitude is in these situations.

In this light, saying "I'm grateful" does not simply express our thanksgiving but actually gives voice to a counter-cultural witness that has the power to shape those around us, push back the tide of resentment and complaint that ails us, and make room for a fresh appreciation of God's renewing, saving grace.

So what if this week, we started practicing gratitude and developing greater thanksgiving-oriented "muscle memory" by responding for the rest of this month to the question, "How are you," with the simple but powerful reply, "I'm grateful." There's more we could do, of course, starting a gratitude list for instance. But for now, perhaps just the challenge and encouragement to say "I'm grateful" is enough. It may us how meaningful this simple practice can be.

Depending on circumstances, this may be difficult. Overwhelmed by grief or loss, for instance, some may have difficulty in giving voice to gratitude just now. And that's okay. It will come. Gratitude is not a command, it's an invitation, one God never tires of making.

~ an excerpt by David Lose, [In the Meantime](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7](#)

Have you ever had to move to a new community, state, or country? What did you find most difficult about getting settled in a new place? What would be the most difficult part of being forcibly relocated like the exiles in Jeremiah or refugees today from nations like Syria, Iraq or Myanmar? How do you think the exiles from Judah would have responded to Jeremiah's letter urging them to settle down and make lives for themselves in Babylon? How would you feel about being told by the prophet of the Lord that you were to seek the "shalom," the welfare, the well-being of the capital city of the empire which had overwhelmed your country and to which you were taken? As Christians, if we pray and work for the welfare of the place where we live, how does that help bear witness to the love of God in our communities? [Brewster Baptist Church](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 66:1-12](#)

Who is called to praise God in this psalm? List some reasons given for offering praise to Him. How had God dealt with Israel? What does it mean to be "tested and refined" by God? (see Hebrews 12:7-11) Reflect on a time in your life when you were "tested or refined" by God. [Monday Night Bible Study](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Ever-present God
you meet us in the borderlands, in places neither here
nor there,
at times when we are well out of our comfort zone;
even if we don't know where we're going, when we
feel most lost,
you are there: Thank you, God.
You meet each of us where we are, and many of us in
our need,
people marginalised by illness, not wanting to be a
burden,
those who see their poverty or problems as
unacceptable –
feeling rejected – with faltering self-worth.
It was in the borderlands that Jesus met a band of
lepers,
whose livelihood was begging, whose status was
untouchable,
and touched their lives with hope.
And it was the Samaritan, the one most of all an
outsider,
who turned back to give thanks.
We thank you for all we can learn
from our sisters and brothers who live on the edge,
in poverty, in the borderlands:
about gratitude, grace and healing hope.
Thank you, God. Amen.

~ Jan Sutch Pickard, [Christian Aid](#)

I imagined the leper with the loud voice "leaping and praising God" like the lame man healed at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:1-10). What happened to the other nine? Perhaps they showed themselves to the priest as Jesus directed them. But then what? What would I have done? Probably run home to restore my past, or reclaim my future. But the loud foreigner? HE embraces the present with gratitude and gets to hear Jesus say, "Your faith has made you well!"

R. S. Thomas writes, Life is not hurrying on to a receding future, /Nor hankering after an imagined past. /It is turning aside like Moses/ To the miracle of a lit bush...(see below, Miscellany). Gratitude urges you to look twice at the same thing, and that second look penetrates to eternity.

The practice of gratitude gradually opens every moment to eternity. Integrity is essential to that practice. Gratitude effects those around us for the better.

John Milton said, "Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world."

May you know the joy and beauty of the eternal present.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

3rd Reading: [2 Timothy 2:8-15](#)

What instructions are in verse 2? What is the message to be passed on, and how should it be passed? In verses 4-6, the writer gives some examples of those who remain focused on their given task. Who are the people mentioned, what is the potential distraction, and how does each one remain focused on their task? While relating it to the struggles faced by Paul and Timothy, what do you think the writer really means when referring to struggling in this passage? What do you think the writer means when he says, "God's word is not chained" in verse nine? How might imprisonment have actually served to "free" the Gospel? Judging from this passage, what distractions do you think the early church face and by what means does the writer urge early Christians to deal with them? [Faith Element](#)

4th Reading: [Luke 17:11-19](#)

Where do you find yourself in this story? What's the divisive problem we wrestle with in the church today? Why do you think the Samaritan was the only one who returned to thank Jesus? What are "borders" in your own life, where you feel perhaps vulnerable or uncertain rather than secure and safe? When has someone else (perhaps an "outsider"), unexpectedly helped you to see something important? [Weekly Seeds](#)