

## “Count Them One by One”

Date: 7 October 2018, Thanksgiving Sunday

Text: Luke 17: 11 - 19

Rev. Peter Coutts

There was a lot of gratitude felt in Calgary on Tuesday in the midst of the monster snow storm. People who were thankful for neighbours who shovelled their sidewalk. 80 bus drivers who were grateful for their understanding and patient passengers when those buses got stuck in the snow. On my way home Tuesday night from the Bible study I watched two cars fail to manage the grade on the Glenmore Flyover. 4 guys jumped out of the nearest cars and pushed the two vehicles to the top. The drivers of those two cars were grateful...as were the many drivers who were waiting for their chance to climb the flyover. Small acts of kindness (the kinds that happen all the time) that foster gratitude. Things that will probably be forgotten in a couple of days. On the other end of the spectrum, on Tuesday a woman I went to highschool with received the Nobel Prize for Physics. She is deeply grateful for the recognition, the honour, the reward. Apparently the University of Waterloo where she teaches plans to celebrate her achievement for an entire year.

These stories from Tuesday are emblematic of the lives we live. We all have peak moments / experiences that foster feelings of great gratitude. A time of baptism, for example, is one such peak moment. Parents (and grandparents and siblings) are grateful for the arrival of a new family member. It is a momentous moment in life. A peak moment. And it is for a congregation as well as they welcome a new little one into the family of faith. Today we are grateful to welcome little Alice. And then there are the host of things that are so small that we don't even realize that they are things we should feel grateful for. Things like the snow brush and scraper being actually in the car when you needed it on Tuesday. That the car started on the first try. And even though it took you longer to drive to work on Tuesday, we got to work. Little things that we probably did not acknowledge thankfulness for. Little things that have long since forgotten.

The story of Jesus healing these lepers is a story about gratitude. It is a story about a peak moment in the lives of ten people. Leprosy in those days was a death sentence. Nothing could be done to change the course of their disease and the disease forced their alienation from a society that understandably didn't want to catch it. Lepers were reduced to beg for the basics needed to sustain life. The Law forbid the lepers from approaching anyone and so we hear in the story that the lepers kept their distance from Jesus, shouting out to Jesus, begging for help. In response Jesus shouted back, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” Jesus didn't touch them. Jesus didn't heal them. It looked like Jesus did nothing! But the lepers understood the Law as it applied to them. In order to re-enter society they had to be certified as

being free of leprosy and only the priests made that certification. Even as they stood there, still infected, what Jesus told them suggested that they might no longer be infected by the time they got to the priests. So they took off, driven by hope that Jesus would change their lives.

As they went on their way to the priests, still covered by the disease, can you imagine the feeling they must have had while watching that wasting disease leave their bodies? Can you imagine the feeling of letting go of the anxiety of watching your body slowly decay to death? Can you imagine them thinking, I am no longer an outcast! A peak moment / experience in one's life that would never, ever be forgotten! So transformative that these ten lepers would be eternally grateful, no question. But I would bet good money on them feeling deep gratitude for an abundance of tiny, tiny things that we overlook and take for granted every day. After their healing I would bet that they would feel grateful every time they hugged a person. Every time they walked into a public market and people didn't scream at them. Grateful that they now had the opportunity to get a job, have a home in town, perhaps even marry and have a family of their own. Each of them would have thought, I can now have friends! Jesus changed their lives in a way that affected the minutiae of their lives, and gave them hope.

If these ten lepers could be transported through time to join us today, here in our worship, I wonder what they would think about how we mark Thanksgiving? Certainly they would appreciate and affirm the significant elements and the peak moments of our lives that we acknowledge and feel thankful for this weekend. My hunch is, though, that they might comment on what we overlook. Things in the minutiae of our lives that are so small that they miss our gratitude. Things that simply get lost in the abundance of what we have that we don't notice them. A simple example: a few years ago doctors placed two stents in an artery supplying my heart. A crucial moment in my life that is the only reason I'm standing here today. For that momentous gift I am grateful, truly. But do I feel gratitude each morning for the gift of each new day I have had since? The fact that I can go on a long walk? That I have had so much more time with my family? This opportunity here to serve Varsity Acres Church and God? That crucial moment in my life gave me hope because every day now I can anticipate another day. This gospel story today reminds me that I have so much more to be thankful for than I am really mindful of...and should be mindful of. Perhaps it does for you as well.

This is a busy worship service today, but for us as people of faith it is an appropriate one for Thanksgiving. In the midst of the minutiae of this service are Kelly who produced the bulletin, our ushers, those who have prepared our coffee hour, the choir that faithfully practices weekly and shares their musical gifts each Sunday. For the property committee that maintains this space, Herve that cleans it, and each bit of financial support that keeps it all going. For these things—the minutiae we easily overlook—we are thankful. As we are also for our special musical guests here today, who add to our celebration in this service of thankfulness. Thank you. But more centrally we have the happy coincidence of celebrating both sacraments today on Thanksgiving, that in an intriguing way parallels the experience of the lepers in our gospel story. The sacraments represent our peak encounters with Jesus.

In our gospel story today, we hear how Jesus cleansed 10 lepers, made them whole and changed the direction of their lives. A peak moment. The waters of baptism signify the cleansing away of our sin, renewing our relationship with God, a sign of our union with Christ. We are to understand our baptism

as a momentous gift, that is to prompt our gratitude because we are now different because of it. Shortly we will celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which some branches of the church call the Eucharist. The word "eucharist" is derived from the Greek word eukharistos, which means "grateful." This is for us the table of thanksgiving where we remember not only Christ's sacrifice for our sake but also remember that Christ walks with us, and supports us, in the minutiae of our lives.

One of the lepers felt so overwhelmed that he'd been made whole that he returned to Jesus to thank him. As for the other 9 they were probably so over-joyed that returning to thank the healer probably didn't occur to them. But here's the thing: those 9 were healed all the same. The gift of new life for the lepers was a gift of grace. The gift of new life that we see in baptism is a gift of grace. Christ's sacrifice for us that is represented in this table...Christ abiding with us in the minutiae of our lives is a gift of grace. We have much to be thankful for and hopeful for.