

The Sunnybrook Pulpit

Rev. Ross Smillie

October 8, 2017 – Thanksgiving Sunday

Gratitude Can Make You Well!

Your gratitude has made you well! – Luke 17:11-19

I tell the story of *Meshka the Kvetch*¹ often at Thanksgiving because I think it is really important to learn to be positive and grateful.

[If you don't know the story, Meshka complains constantly: about how her feet are as swollen as melons and her son is as lazy as a pickle. Then one day, her tongue starts to itch and everything she complains about actually happens: her feet really do turn into melons and her son into a pickle. She has the Kvetch's Itch. In order to undo this curse, she has to learn to praise the good things in her life.]

Many of us, like Meshka, focus on the negative. We are critical of ourselves, of the people around us, of the situations we are in, and as a result, we make ourselves unhappy and we make ourselves sick. There is a story in the Bible about ten lepers whom Jesus cured of their leprosy, but only one came back to say thank you, and that was the one who was made really well. The other ten were cured of that one disease, but only the one who gave thanks experienced real health.

Did you know that psychologists have discovered that people who are grateful on a regular basis are healthier in many ways: they have stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure, less anxiety and depression, fewer symptoms of illness, and are less bothered by aches and pains when they are sick; they sleep better, get more hours of sleep, wake up less often, and feel more rested when they do wake up' they recover better from traumatic events, cope better with PTSD, have stronger relationships with those close to them, and forgive more easily.²

¹ by Carol Chapman, Penguin Group

² from Sharon Basaraba, CBC radio Calgary, the Homstretch, October 9, 2014,
<http://www.cbc.ca/player/Radio/Local+Shows/Alberta/ID/2548962173/>

So, one of the most helpful things we can do to look after ourselves and the people around us is to practice being grateful. So let's practice that right now. Let's make the longest list we can on things we are grateful for. And let's do it really fast.

Everyone call out something you are grateful for.

- truck drivers and scientists, gasoline, fertilizer, sewage treatment plants, pvc pipe, my furnace, electricity, light bulbs, my cuddley cat, cathode ray tubes and LEDs

Did you know that a lot of the things we should be grateful for, we might not even be aware of? Did you know that we can't live without ants that recycle all the dead things? Did you know that without the plankton in the oceans there wouldn't be enough oxygen for us to breath? Did you know that without nitrogen fixing bacteria lots of things wouldn't be able to grow? Did you know that without the genetic mutations which in some cases lead to cancer, in other cases lead to evolution, and that without them we wouldn't even be here?

There are so many things that we should be grateful for, because we depend on them. Even when it seems like lots of things in your life are not going well, there are a lot of things going right, so many things going right that you can't even count them all, you aren't even aware of most of them. We take them for granted, because we can. If they stopped working, things would go wrong pretty quickly.

There is a beautiful prayer, a poem prayer that I really like that celebrates the generosity of God and confesses the poverty of our gratitude:

“Extravagant God,” by Fred Ohler

Excessive / generous / lavish God...

why do you waste so much time on us?

You create rainbows / that no one sees;

shower down intricate separate unique / stunning

snowflakes by the billions / and one at a time

that we greet not with applause

but with complaints of inconvenience.

You place whales / beneath fathoms of ocean

singing their plaintive / haunting songs / too deep for our ears / to hear.

Why is Your kindness so extravagant? / Your excess so much—

why are we so bored and dull?

Why do we appreciate water most in a desert

health only during sickness / our friend when he leaves

our love when she dies?
Should we pray for less / for You to ration Your grace
to waste no rainbows?

Forgive us. / You don't paint rainbows just for us to see
nor make birdsong just for us to hear.

Rebuke our terrible pride / and chastise our deism
that imagines You created only once / long ago
and can't perceive Genesis now / or Eden here
or what a new day means.

Help us to do two impossible things:

to take it ALL in/ (every miraculous atom of it)
and

to waste our time on A rose / a place / a time / a person.

Perhaps one will bring us to all / full time to eternity
one blackbird to You.

Prodigal God, may we find

a millionth of the joy that clearly is Yours
amen.³

This Thanksgiving weekend, let us make a point of cherishing one thing, trusting
that the one will bring us to all. Amen.

³ Frederich Ohler, *Better Than Nice and Other Unconventional Prayers*, p. 47-8.