

When I was in highschool, and while I was in the Public Relations program at Mount Royal College, I worked for a guy by the name of Leo Sheftel. He was a successful businessman who, when I knew him, owned five hotels in Calgary. I had the privilege of working for Leo at the Highlander Motor Hotel on the North Hill near McMahon stadium as a bellman, and at the Carriage House, way down south on McLeod Trail as a member of the front desk staff. For five years, I had a blast working with the staff and the travelers. Many people came and went in those years, but I have never forgotten Leo, once they met him, no one ever did.

Leo's career in business began when he was a 13-year-old immigrant, having recently arrived with his Jewish family from Ratna, Poland, standing on a downtown street corner selling newspapers he could not read because he spoke only Polish, Russian and Yiddish. From peddling papers and magazines, to opening a number of fruit and vegetable stands, to building the Highlander, the first hotel built in Calgary outside of the downtown core; Leo learned that people would pay for good service. And what was incredible to me was how respectful Leo was of everyone, his staff, his customers, his family, his competitors.

I remember especially, the number of newly minted Canadians who got their starts as busboys and housecleaning staff. And they were the ones who were always laughing, always hardworking, and always early on the job. Leo knew what it was to be an immigrant and he was quick to employ those who came looking for work, even when there wasn't a job. He found a way to include them in the work schedule. And they were the ones most grateful for the job.

That's what I notice in the story that Marion read for us today. There are lots of things to notice in this story; I could find a lot of sermon material in this little nine verse text. But for today, I notice it's the foreigner who prostrates himself, throws himself to the ground in deep gratitude for the new, restored life he is given. Nine others were with the foreigner when Jesus sent them off to see the priest who would verify their health. Only the foreigner, the hated Samaritan, says thank you.

If you read my blog this week you'll know that on a recent flight to Calgary for our son's graduation, I struck up a conversation with my seat mate, a fellow from Brazil, who gave up his friends and extended family, and a lucrative, high profile position in the academic world to come to Canada. He is just one of thousands of people with new, permanent residence status trying to find their way. He came to Canada because he respects Canada, he respects our social policies and programs, and he respects our manners and our kindness.

Finding a position in the academic world will be long term process, if not near impossible for him, so he think he wants to work in the hotel business. The story of his job search is troubling; it would break the Spirits of most of us. Too bad Leo isn't still alive with properties in the Lower Mainland. But in spite of this fellow's experiences, in my last conversation with him, he bristled at the thought of returning to Brazil. He is far too grateful and hopeful to be here, to let the minor setback of a job search deter his living a full life, regardless of the outcome.

I don't want you to think for an instant that we need to ignore to the real, everyday issues that confront us – particularly those life-threatening situations that create real fear in us. Living with fear is not an easy thing. But for this morning, I'd like to try something.

Think of those things that worry us.....you know what they are. The really hard, scary, troubling situations – the diagnosis, the treatment, the heart ache, the disappointments, the broken relationships. If we work hard at this and really spend time thinking about these things, we can really spin out on it....we can crank it up pretty well. Right? Are you doing that? Pretty lousy way to spend thanksgiving huh? Okay...so shake your head...imagine going for a walk....phoning a friend...eating that sumptuous turkey dinner...whatever.

Now, think of those things that cause you great delight ... the relationships that bring you joy, the work that calls out the best in you, the music that touches your soul, the peace that you know deep within you. What happened to your troubles? They disappeared, right? Gratitude and worry make very strange bed fellows. They don't live side by side particularly well.

I do think it's harder to be grateful. It takes more work. We don't easily trip out on our good news and I wonder if it's because we have conditioned ourselves to focus on bad news and bad experiences. I wonder if we have come to believe what the culture reminds us everyday; that we don't have enough, we don't love enough, we don't try enough, we aren't enough. For this thanksgiving, when you're dining with your family and your friends and even when you're dining alone, I invite you to develop this practice. Spend time creating a list that will live in you; a list of all those wonderful things you thought about a moment ago.

I've entitled this sermon, "radical thanks." Contrary to our understanding, the word radical comes from the Latin word radix; radicis which means root – of or having roots. Think radish. It means going to the origin, the essential. Now reconsider the foreigner, the Samaritan, who lay prostrate at Jesus feet; in Jesus presence, the man is praising God. In his eyes, they're one and the same. This foreigner is teaching us to throw ourselves upon the ground, rooted in gratitude. Gratitude is a spiritual discipline, a spiritual practice that runs against some of the voices of our culture. My hope is that we develop this practice with vigor for the healing of the world. May your thanksgiving be grounded, rooted in many blessings. Amen.