



## **Sermons from Northwood United Church**

**“Gratitude Self-talk”**

**Deuteronomy 8:7-18, Luke 17:11-19  
Will Sparks                      October 12, 2014**

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

“People actually consider walking on water, or in thin air, to be a miracle,” says Thich Nhat Hahn. “But I think the real miracle is not to walk on either water or air, but to walk on the earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don’t even recognize: A blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black curious eyes of a child- our own eyes. All is a miracle.” The miracle we celebrate at Thanksgiving- the miracle that we have been exploring throughout the season of Creation, since 4 weeks ago we spoke of Awe as the most appropriate starting place to search for the hand of the Creator within the creation. And then we spoke of the process of life, in all its amazing unfolding, as a divine process. Maybe life itself gives us a window into the mind of the Life-giver. And then we took a look at science not as a threat to faith but as a way of seeing more deeply into the handiwork of the divine. And then last week, on Worldwide Communion Sunday, we attempted to get real about what is happening for others who share this amazing blue-green home with us, and the power of these connections to bring hope. And finally today, Thich Nhat Hahn points us to our feet and the miracle of walking on this earth. If the most appropriate beginning posture for this exploration was awe the most appropriate ending one is gratitude. But let’s go back in time from the prophet Hahn to the prophet Moses. Because Thich Nhat Hahn is not the only one who has taken off his shoes and asked us to think carefully about our relationship with what we have and where we stand.

Moses is an old man, old in many ways. Old because he has lived long. Old because he has endured much as the leader of a sometimes jubilant, sometimes fractious people of Israel. And after forty years of wandering in the wilderness hoping for, waiting for, searching for the promised land, they finally arrive, on the banks of the Jordan River. They look across and they realize that all they had dreamed of, all they had hoped and longed and worked for lies before them. The promised land, flowing with milk and honey.

And it felt like the height of excitement and fulfillment, like the big arrival, like the event of the century, like a brand new life after an awfully long labour and delivery. “The old has passed away! Behold, the new!” It was rich, and sweet. It was abundant and full. And what would be more appropriate than to celebrate and enjoy and indulge. They had given up so much for this. They had gone without for so long for this. And now they had arrived and so... break out the champagne! The war is over! The yoke is lifted. Let’s put the past behind us and get on with the future.

Moses, in his old age is in there with the best of them. He’s waited for this and paid a high price for this and he has probably more to celebrate than anyone. But there is something niggling at him- something that wants to be said. The prophet in him is saying, “wait just a minute! There is something we are forgetting!”

And so Moses speaks, as much to himself as to anyone else, “When you go across the river into the promised land, it will be wonderful and it will be the fulfillment of all that you had hoped for. But when you get there, and you are full and comfortable, and perhaps when a generation or two have gone by and you are growing accustomed to being in the promised land,

and when you have houses and lands and stability like you have never had before, that's the dangerous time. When you are enjoying the fruits of your labour, and it is all in great abundance, it will be tempting to go to sleep, and forget about God. It will be tempting to think that you did this all yourself. It will be tempting to think that you are self made people. It will be tempting to allow your vulnerable self, your wanderer self, the self within you that knows how tenuous and vulnerable your life really is to wither. Don't let that happen. In that moment, give your head a shake. Give yourself a talking to about the past and about gratitude."

Don't forget! Remember the Red Sea, and how vulnerable you were, and how God made the seas part. Remember how you wondered which direction to go and God led you with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Remember when you were hungry, and God sent manna. Remember how you were thirsty and God sent water from a rock. Remember when your community was flying apart because of disagreements, and arguments and God sent the ten commandments to show you how to remain faithful to God and to each other. It will be tempting to think that you did this all by yourselves. But remember, no one makes themselves. No one breaks themselves. Whether we make it or break it depends not on ourselves but on a delicate balance of life on this earth that is God's gift.

It is a miracle to walk upon the earth, an amazing miracle. But in our culture of what Mary Jo Leddy in her book "Radical Gratitude" calls perpetual dissatisfaction, in which we are fed a daily dose of yearning for more and bigger and better we can easily forget that. And in Canada of all places, living in a land flowing with milk and honey as we do, in these days of grave concern for security, it can be tempting to close off our borders to newcomers forgetting that for most of us we don't have to go back very far to find a time when we ourselves were newcomers, vulnerable, wandering, in which we, like Moses and the people, stood on the shores for the first time and beheld this land as a gift, an amazing gift. How quickly we can forget, or fall asleep and take this land for granted, become hungry of new miracles, as if walking on this earth were not miracle enough.

So today or tomorrow, when a second piece of pumpkin pie is sitting heavy in your stomach, and the roasting turkey bathes your house with the smell of abundance, when you walk upon the yellow and red carpets of fall, and you breath the crisp air of coming winter, behold the miracle of it all. Give your head a shake and yourself a gratitude talking to. Allow that sense of gratitude to erode any forgetfulness that might be in you, erode our yearning for more, erode our desire to pull up the drawbridge and keep it for our own. Let gratitude have its way with you. Amen