

Thanksgiving, October 11, 2020

✚ These are hard times. We have so much to be concerned about – even to be fearful of. It is easy to get overwhelmed by all the bad news in the world, and so get distracted from all that is good. It would be wrong to pretend that everything is okay and live in a happy little bubble, ignoring the suffering of the world and to close our compassionate hearts to all that ails the world. But, all of that pain is simply a small fraction of the greater experience of life: a beautiful gift of God, the purpose of which seems to be nothing more or less than the chance to experience the enormity of God’s love, beauty, mystery and creative genius. The suffering is somehow a part of that – something

without which we wouldn’t know the fulness of God’s being and God’s mercy or compassion.

✚ I’m not here today to offer an explanation for suffering, though. My task today is to help us remember the bigger picture – to get back on track: to say: “Hey, let’s not lose focus on our purpose as human beings by getting so distracted by all that seems to be wrong.”

Today, we mark Thanksgiving, a day to wipe away all the grittiness and darkness of this moment from our lenses and once again see the beauty of life – this great gift of God.

✚ The Hebrew scriptures remind us over and over again in so many ways of God’s basic

generosity and love. In Deuteronomy today, we have that wonderful passage about all that God has blessed these people with: good land with abundant water that produces wheat, barley, vines, figs, pomegranates, and olives. The bees produce honey, the hills are rich in mineral resources. Everyone has plenty to eat. They have fine houses and herds and flocks and wealth. God had rescued them from slavery, fed them in the desert and given them a new and rich life. The passage concludes with a simple reminder not to get high and mighty and self-righteous, but to be humble and remember that everything comes from God.

✚ Psalm 65 is another reminder of this. God listens to us, forgives us and protects us. God who made the mountains and the seas and day

and night; who waters the earth and provides grain to eat – this God is the source of all that is. God has given us life and provided plenty for all to enjoy it.

✚ The Hebrew scriptures have a deep sense of the all-encompassing enormity of God's graciousness and God's care for all life, and they are a helpful reminder when we get caught up in all that is going wrong, or in the darkened perspective on life that tells us of a world of scarcity, competition and danger, or when we start to think that this is our world and we are its masters.

✚ If there is one word that comes to mind in taking in these readings it is humility. Without humility there is no real gratitude, but only self-

reliance and all the fears and worries that come with that. And these readings call us to be humble.

✚ Jesus tells us a story about that today. This is a story of ten lepers: people with disfiguring skin diseases who were cast out of society, deemed unclean and sinful. You really couldn't get much lower than a leper on the social ladder of the day. Jesus is passing through a village in the borderland between Jews and Samaritans; a place that any good Jew would pass through as quickly as possible for fear of contamination in this liminal and questionable place.

✚ These ten lepers approach him in faith. They probably didn't care whether he was Jewish or Samaritan or a Buddhist monk – but they had

apparently heard that he was a healer, so they kept their distance from him out of respect, but begged for mercy. Jesus, not knowing anything about them or their religio-cultural backgrounds simply tells them to go and find their priests, presumably to go and perform whatever rituals or sacrifices were required of them.

✚ The amazing thing is though, that Jesus had mercy on them. In his heart he desired their health and their wholeness and whenever that happens (as we heard in the story of the bleeding woman), the power of God simply went out from him and they are healed. Jesus couldn't help but love them and fill them with that healing love. *“And, as they went they were made clean.”* Their disease was gone and they

could rejoin their communities – become regular people once again.

✚ Well, as you know, one of them came back, and in deep gratitude prostrated himself before Jesus and while praising God – thanked Jesus. The other nine were unable to become humble and return in thanks, and the one who did wasn't even Jewish. That didn't matter. God's love and Jesus' compassion were bigger than religious boundaries. In this liminal place – (liminal meaning on the margins – where black and white aren't sharp distinctions), God's love flourishes as it brings life to everyone who asks for it – even if they don't say thank you.

✚ As we mark Thanksgiving today, we say thank you to God who gives us every breath we

breathe, who provides a rich land where there is plenty for all to flourish, who listens to the pain in our hearts and who sees the suffering we endure and regardless of our faithfulness to God or lack thereof, continues to make us clean. That is, continues to heal sick bodies and so restore us to our lives in community with others.

✚ Our arrogance and greed and fearfulness and distractedness from what is really important and true certainly all make a mess of the gifts we are given, and so we end up in a world of so much unnecessary pain and suffering. But God keeps on giving and giving and loving and healing and making us clean. Whether we recognize it or not, everything comes as gift – and what a gift that is! There is enough for

everyone and the potential for joy in life is unlimited for every human being and for every other species. All of that is enough for our deep gratitude, but there is more still.

✚ In the story of the ten lepers, they are all healed – made clean. Such is God’s graciousness. All ten of them walk away with a new life before them, and hopefully they all enjoyed this new life. But the one who returned to give thanks got something else simply due to a different perspective. This one ex-leper was able to see through the darkened lens of gloom and doom of the life of a leper. This one person was able to see God at work in life and was humbled by this gift of new life.

✚ In that humiliation he was made not just clean and so restored to life in community with others, but he was made well, or whole. In Jesus, he has seen God and not only is his health restored and so his life in the community also given back to him, but he has seen that God was there all along, has always given him the gift of life each new day and will always give that gift. In Jesus, this ex-leper has experienced the fulness of life that goes beyond our bodies and our everyday concerns and worries. He has glimpsed that perspective of life as belonging to the eternity that is God. He is made well (an understatement if I’ve ever heard one).

✚ On this Thanksgiving in the midst of so much that is going wrong, let us remember and with

humble gratitude, give thanks to God not just for the gift of everyday life (incredible and even miraculous as that is); but for the gift of Jesus in and through whom we get a glimpse of and experience the fulness of our eternal being in God. For, that glimpse – that experience, gives us the humility, the hope, the compassion, the love and the power to find fulness of life – true wellness – even in the darkest times. And it is a gift we can share with our neighbours, bringing that same hope and wellness into their lives. So, for all that God gives us in Christ, on this Thanksgiving Sunday, let us rub the darkness off of the lenses through which we see life, see witness the beauty of God and all of God’s creation and say “thank you God”!