

'And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.' (Luke 17:12-16)

There are certain Sundays in the church calendar that can be very awkward for a preacher, hopefully not because they can't think of anything to say, but because the theme of the day is so narrow that thinking of something that hasn't been said before becomes more difficult. In addition, usually the lectionary usually has nothing to do with the subject, so it all seems a bit disconnected.

Two of these Sunday's that readily come to mind readily are Mothering Sunday and Harvest Festival; fairly narrow subjects that once they have been preached on for four years, the preacher has really said all there is to say without repetition. This, combined with the fact that I have been told not to preach my usual hour-long sermon on account of people wanting to eat at a decent hour, well, I am presented with a dilemma; what do I preach on that has a tenuous link to harvest time in the readings? Let's go to Luke 17.

Now this is a perfect example of what I mean. Here, Jesus heals 10 lepers without a cob of corn, an ear of barley, a husk of rye, a sheaf of wheat or a grain of rice or even a blade of grass getting a mention! No apples, oranges pomegranates, cabbage, potatoes or spaghetti or pasta shapes getting a mention either. No! Jesus heals 10 lepers and only one of them comes back to praise and thank him and he a Samaritan at that. Here, Luke encourages us to remember about the last mention of a Samaritan doing a good turn in Ch.10.

Now one can say Jesus is being a bit harsh here, in pointing out the ingratitude of the other nine lepers. After all, they have done exactly what he told them to! They, like the Samaritan were told to go to a priest to finish the cleansing and then they probably followed that with joyful family reunion somewhere. This man, a Samaritan and therefore a foreigner had no priest to go to, nor family to rejoin and rejoice with. He probably thought about this as he started to go on his way and maybe considered this question: who could finish this cleansing more powerfully than the one who had started it? Hence he back-tracks to offer thanks and praise for his healing and the renewal of his life.

There are all sorts of things one can read into this, but here, the Samaritan reasons that while the others can go to a priest of their own religion, he cannot. Therefore, if Jesus brought about the miracle, he must be a priest of his own of some kind and would be able to do for him, a foreigner, what was requested. As well as praising God, which he might have done anyway, as a member of the former ten tribes of Israel, he was grateful to Jesus for his miraculous act of kindness. Did he realise later that he was praising and showing gratitude to no other than God himself? We shall never know, but Jesus sends him on his way, cleansed and whole.

RT Kendall in his book 'Did you think to pray' makes three points about gratitude:

1. God loves gratitude.
2. God hates ingratitude
3. Gratitude is something that is learned.

He is quite right.

In my past life I have not shown anywhere near enough gratitude to God for the blessings I received from him. Reading this a few years ago pulled me up short. Not being grateful for his blessings was my greatest sin against God and I resolved to do something about it. What I discovered was that the more I thanked God for his blessings, the more obvious they became to me! This is because gratitude becomes a vital connection with God in prayer, it shows him that you are engaged with him and in the same way we enjoy being thanked for something we have done, so does he.

However, gratitude to God is a habit to acquire like any other. If you want to enjoy your relationship with God to the full then thank him and TELL HIM SO! He will love it and you will feel great also. What's more, even in the darkest of times you will start to notice how much he really loves you, moves with you in the situation and does for you that which you never realised. Today is a day we thank God for the harvest that allows us to exist. Don't let us confine our thanks to God for the one day a year only.