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AMDG

Proper 23C, Pentecost 21 - October 9, 2016

I believe profound gratitude is the grandest emotion we possess as humans. I believe that when we experience profound gratitude, we are closest to God. I think it's akin to one of the four promises that Fr. Derwent described last week - the promise that we'd be absurdly happy. This experience of profound gratitude may not come often, for some it rarely comes at all. But, you know it when you feel it. It's powerful, and can bring you to tears, laughter, or awestruck silence.

And, it's this experience of profound emotion that today's Gospel story is about. Jesus is travelling through the borderland of Samaria and Judea, and is confronted by ten lepers who he heals. The Samaritan leper - and of course it's the Samaritan, just like Luke to have Jesus praise the odd one - the Samaritan leper turns back to express his gratitude and falls at Jesus' feet in worship.

There are two things we need to pay attention to here. First, it's that the other nine did nothing wrong. In fact, they did exactly as they were told. Jesus doesn't take back their cure, or even explicitly criticize them. But when the Samaritan notices his healing, turns back and gives thanks, Jesus affirms him and blesses him a second time. That's the second important thing to note. He was blessed a second time. He received the blessing of healing, as did the other nine. But the Samaritan also received the blessing *that comes from recognizing blessing and giving thanks* -- the blessing of wholeness, which could also be called salvation.

When Jesus tells him to rise and go his way, and says your faith has made you well, he is using the Greek word, *sozo*, which is a deeper wellness than just physical. Jesus is telling the tenth leper that his faith has made him not only physically well, but also whole and, indeed, saved. The Samaritan's profound gratitude for his original healing opened him to even greater blessing. It gave him a glimpse of his wholeness, we might even call it belovedness. That is the power of profound gratitude - it multiplies grace exponentially.

Have you ever noticed how powerful it is not only to receive a blessing but also to name it and give thanks for it? Maybe you're at dinner with family or friends, and it's one of those meals where everything is lovingly prepared, everyone is enjoying themselves. And, time just seems to stop for a little while and you have that overwhelming feeling of connection, a nearly unfathomable sense of community. And then you lean over to a loved one or, or maybe raise your glass in a toast, and say, "This is great. This time, this meal. I love you all. Thank you." And in recognizing the blessing of that special meal and responding by giving thanks, the original blessing is somehow multiplied. You've been blessed a second time in profound gratitude.

Or maybe you're at a special place - we live in a land of so many beautiful places - and you take in the beautiful view. Then you say to your companion, or maybe just aloud to yourself, "This is so beautiful. I'm so happy to be here. Thank you." And again, the blessing is multiplied; you've been blessed yet again.

This week I experienced it at Clinic, when I was out among the children and families, and stopped to talk to one little girl, Angela, who put her tiny little hand in mine and smiled. The whole of her hand lay on three of my fingers; her smile lit up the space we occupied together. I was in awe, and so grateful to be able to have that moment with her. I said thank you, not just to Angela, but to God, for giving me that moment of connection.

That is profound gratitude, it's an absurd almost inexplicable happiness. It doesn't just happen. It springs from perception, being present enough to recognize a blessing in our lives and responding with gratitude for that gift, no matter how inadequate our words of thanks may seem at the time. And every time these two are combined -- recognition and response, sight and word -- the act of giving thanks actually grants a second blessing.

Profound gratitude has great power. It draws us out of ourselves into something larger, bigger, and grander than we could imagine and joins us to the font of all blessing itself. It can free us from fear, release us from anxiety, and embolden us to do more and dare more than we'd ever imagined.

And that's what the other nine lepers missed. It's not that they did anything wrong. The other nine lepers received God's abundant blessings, just as we all do - whether we deserve them or not, appreciate them or not, or whether we even want them. The sad thing about the other nine is that they weren't present enough to recognize their blessing, and didn't respond with thanks. So it is with us too often, so concerned with our own fears, resentments, and selfish wants that we're oblivious to God's gifts. Like the other nine lepers we miss out on the greater blessing of being connected to God's grace in profound gratitude.

We are all so very blessed. Our lives are filled with blessing. Friends and families that we care for and who care for us. Opportunities to serve God in our work lives and in our personal lives. A country, though imperfect, still a beacon of freedom and opportunity for the world, and a form of government in which we can address its imperfections openly. The beauty of this land of southern Arizona. And this wonderful faith community of St. Andrew's, where we know one another well, like a family, and where we are given opportunity to share our blessings in very impactful ways such as through the Clinic, the Preschool, and the many other ministries that benefit our community.

Yes, the world is also filled with great challenges and ugliness. And, there is a time to lament and a time to cry out for peace and a time to do justice. But given that we live in a culture so filled with ugliness, blame and accusation and so devoid of gratitude, maybe remembering the tenth leper, we can each try to be a little more present to the myriad blessings bestowed upon us by our Creator, and we can each have just a little more willingness to stop and give heartfelt thank yous just a little more often, to each other, but especially to God. And, then, experiencing multiplied levels of blessing and gratitude, we can go forth into the world to be the heralds of great blessing and the bearers of profound gratitude to our weary world.