

Thanks-living

1 Chronicles 29:10-17; Psalm 34 1-10; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 17:11-19

'Yours, O Lord are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours. For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.'

Last week, as we reflected on the call to give, I suggested that our giving isn't to be driven by a sense of should and ought but as an expression of our thankfulness for all that God has given us and done for us. And today, that's our focus: we come to say, 'thank you God'.

I was exploring with a group in one of our rest homes what thanksgiving meant to us, and one of the members chimed in: 'When I woke up this morning, the first thing I did was to say thank you for the gift of another day.' And as if to bring the lesson home, the first thing I did when I finished that service, was to bless the room of a resident who had died the day before... Yes, let's not take for granted the gift of life – the gift that we are here today. As I get older the words of the 14th century theologian and mystic, Meister Eckhart, becomes increasingly pertinent: 'If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.'

Every celebration of the Eucharist (a word which means 'thanksgiving') has an offertory, even though not all eucharists have a 'collection'. At the offertory we offer bread, wine, our gifts of money, and food for the foodbank, and – most important of all – we offer ourselves. All that we have and all that we are is a gift from God, and we respond to this by giving thanks – by sharing what we have been given: our money, our time, our experience and talents.

Now, it's all very well to talk about this, but what are we going to do about it? How are we going to respond to all that we've been given, with gratitude? What's it going to mean for the way we live? If we don't ask that question, it all becomes no more than words. Someone said, thanksgiving is *thanks-living*.

One way we can show thanks is by how we use a gift. For example, we can give thanks for the gift of our lives by taking care of ourselves – physically and emotionally. We pray for those in our wider community and give thanks for those who serve us in so many ways, and then we can give that real and personal expression by how we talk to the person who serves us in the supermarket, or who delivers a parcel to our home. It may sound a rather obvious thing to do but when, the other day, I told the man who delivers a food box to our house each week, how much I appreciated the work he did, he was deeply moved. I suspect he's seldom thanked. Thanksgiving, as the Gospel passage illustrates, is so often noticeable by its absence.

So, what comes to your mind about how to express thanks-living? ...

How might we translate our thanksgiving into action? ...

By living thankfully, by making it an integral part of how we live – enables us to say with the psalmist, 'I will give thanks to the Lord at all times, God's praise will always be on my lips.' It's like Paul telling the Philippians: 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice'. And there's something I find really interesting – I wonder if anyone else noticed it too. The advice to 'rejoice' is closely connected with 'do not worry about anything'. I think that's because acknowledging and expressing gratitude for a few things helps us notice even more things that God has done, ways in which God has blessed us. Often, we find what we're looking for; because what we focus on is what we end up seeing. So as we notice more of the things that God does in our lives and the gifts that we receive from God we get better at trusting God. As the psalmist says again, 'those who fear the Lord are in want of

nothing. Strong lions suffer want and go hungry, but those who seek the Lord shall lack nothing that is good.'

When we live thankfully it gives us a new way of living. In today's Gospel reading, I'm sure all of them were pleased to be healed, but only one did something about it – he turned back, praised God aloud, said thank you to Jesus, and found that his faith had made him whole again. He then he set out on a new kind of life. And I think that's what we are called to do – to live a new kind of life – a life in which each of us is generous with our time and our talents, and generous with our money. And to act towards each other and towards those around us with a generosity of spirit. It's all about thanks-living – living as people who are ever-mindful of how much God has blessed them.

Take a few minutes now to be still and recall what God has given you
– call to mind some specific things you might give thanks for...

As you come to the altar-table this morning, stretching out your hands to receive the gift of Jesus' body and blood, you might offer those thanksgivings to God as your gift in response to what God gives you. And in the days ahead I encourage you to practice a spiritual discipline of listing your blessings, naming them before God, and giving thanks. Perhaps at the end of the day spend a few minutes reflecting on what has been, calling to mind at least two or three things you want to thank God for (they may be as simple as a smile received or a gracious word spoken) – and stay with them – share them with God, telling God what they mean to you. And then, keep asking, how you might share what God has given you. And you might use the words of George Herbert, who prayed,

Gracious God,
you have given so much to me,
give me one more thing – a grateful heart!

Alister Hendery
– *Hastings July 2023*