

13 October 2013: 2 Timothy 2:8-15 and Luke 17:11-19

## THANK YOU!

Have any of you ever stopped to consider how many times a day you say 'thank you'? It trips off the tongue so often. We say it to the bus driver, to someone who holds a door open for us or stands aside for us to go in first, we said it this morning to the welcomer who gave us a copy of the weekly sheet (or at least I hope we did), to those who serve us in shops, anyone who makes us a cup of tea, and so on.....

I sat down last night and tried to say thank you for everyone and everything that was making my life possible. There are those I will never know who labour to give me light, heat and water at the touch of a button or tap or who work to provide the food and material things I buy. Those who love me and give me the encouragement I need and crave. Those who depend on me and yet give me so much in return. Those who have taught me. Those who show me how to live as a Christian. Those who are kind to me even when I'm horrid. Those with whom I can share my deepest desires. Those who make me laugh. Those who make me want to scream. Those who give me help even without my having to ask. Those who exercise their professional skills to keep me well or to keep my car on the road and the boiler working.

John Donne wrote: 'No man is an island entire of itself'. And I only scratched the surface of the web that joins me to so many people. It was an interesting exercise though and brought back wonderful memories of people who have influenced me and also made me aware of how small I am in the scheme of things. It also made me think about how I can mask who I am, how I chose to show only certain aspects of myself to others.

Our society and culture considers us rude if we fail to say thank you. I was interested to read a list of 10 reasons why 'thank you' should be the two first words a child learns to say. Now in my experience it's usually something else entirely. The reasons all seemed to be variations on good manners, reflecting well on their parents and making the giver feel appreciated. All quite sound in their own way, but you know there was only one reason that seemed to get to the heart of 'thank you'. Which is that it expresses gratitude.

Gratitude that someone has done something for us.

We are quick to say thank you to those around us. Good manners demands it. And sometimes it is merely manners that impels us say it. Other times we want to say it as an encouragement to others. To show that what they have done has really helped us. And there doesn't really need anything to be said in return, least of all the response, oh it was nothing. In that case, it's as if the thanks have been rejected in some way, because even if the thing that is being thanked for was a simple thing, easily done, it probably meant a great deal to the one giving thanks.

Gratitude that someone has done something for us.

Psalms 111 says 'I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart' and goes on to list all the reasons why. They relate to what used to be known as the properties of God, righteousness, wisdom, grace, mercy, justice.

The collect for today asks that we may be made eager to do God's will and to share joy. I don't know about you, but my heart lifts when I'm in the company of someone who doing God's will joyfully.

Timothy is encouraged by Paul to remind his congregation that 'if we have died with Christ we will live with him; if we endure we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will deny us and yet if we are faithless he remains faithful ....for he cannot deny himself'. Tom Wright suggests that 'faithless' here means when we come under pressure, then our reliability, our stickability, our resolve and determination to remain faithful may wobble. Then we have to rely on the promise that God is faithful. But if we turn our backs on him, then he will turn his back on us.

The Message finishes off this passage saying: Concentrate on doing your best for God, work you won't be ashamed of, laying out the truth plain and simple.

This part of the letter to Timothy encourages us to keep going – if you like Keep Calm and Carry On – put into context of earlier chapters we can only keep on going by the power of God, through the gift of the Holy Spirit. And what do we say to the giver of gifts? Yes, thank you.

Gratitude is more than just saying those words, words we throw around so often like confetti. Gratitude is a state of being thankful, of saying I will remember what you have done for me. And in the case of being thankful to God, we are thankful for God's grace and mercy, for the things that we don't deserve.

There have been times this past week when my persistent cough has made me feel as if I should have been ringing a bell and calling out unclean as I walked into the office. Though I haven't experienced the social exclusion inflicted on the 10 lepers in the reading from Luke. All 10 asked for mercy and all were made clean by Jesus, but only one, a Samaritan and an outsider, returns to praise God and to thank Jesus. That's not to say that the others weren't delighted by what had happened, we simply don't know. None of them had to 'do' anything to receive this gift from God. And yet only one is mindful enough of that grace to recognise where it has come from and to give thanks.

Are we mindful of God's grace? When I made that list of who I should thank for enabling me to live as well as I do, did I give thanks to God. You know I didn't. Partly of course, God's grace is given through others. God intends his church to be a community of love and so many of the thanks I gave were because I have experienced love from those who love God. But I know there is much else that God has changed in me that is simply a gift from Him.

One of the glib phrases we use is 'count your blessings'. Sometimes we only do it when we are feeling hard done by or something terrible is looming and we say: I really should count my blessings. Almost as if to say I'm being selfish feeling bad or angry about what is happening to me, when I've got all these other good things. I think we should and can acknowledge being hurt and angry and upset.

Instead, I suggest that a beneficial practice is to review the day. I do when walking home from work, what do I want to say thank you for; what went well, what unlooked for good thing happened, when did I bite my tongue? It will also bring up those things where despite wanting to 'live without blemish', I have failed to do so, but failing is different from not even trying! Sometimes it will feel like, oh here I am again Lord, messed up again. But it can also be a wonderful time of trying to see the light in the darkness and giving thanks to God for the blessings he has given me, often through other people, undeserved by me.

There are many ways of looking at the structure of this morning's service. There is a reason everything happens in this particular order. And in one sense it can be said to move from apology to thank you, like my review of the day though with quite a lot of praise and prayer in between.

Apology is found within the confession, both the spoken words we say together and the thoughts, words and deeds we call to mind as part of the preparation.

We move on to praise and to intercession

We finish by saying thank you. We give thanks for being fed, acknowledging the gift of life that has been given to us. A gift that is one of grace and mercy and is one that we have done nothing to deserve. As we leave and go out from here, may we take that gift with us. While we may wobble in our faithfulness, may we put into practice each a state of thankfulness and gratitude to God.

Amen

Sarah Thomas 13 October 2013