

Sunday 9th October 2022

Addington

Readings: 2 Kings 5:1-14c; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

Reflection: Cultivating An Attitude of Gratitude

How do we cultivate an attitude of gratitude? Sometimes it takes a *humbling* experience like the one Naaman had when sent by the prophet Elisha to wash in the Jordan River seven times (that is, completely), to cure his leprosy. Naaman, a mighty warrior and commander in the king of Aram's army was not at all impressed with this very understated 'prescription' delivered by a messenger. (Perhaps we've experienced a taste of this during Covid, when face-to-face appointments with our GPs were substituted by phone consultations, online-diagnoses or carpark visits; and 'drive-thru' vaccinations replaced more orthodox care in many places.)

'Surely I, an important man of high standing, would be seen in person by the prophet - whose God would perform a dramatic and miraculous healing', thought Naaman the army commander. Surely he was not expected to soak in a muddy stream without even a consultation? Interestingly, it was Naaman's own servants who exposed his 'shadow-side' of self-importance and pride, encouraging him to see the power of healing in a very simple act of faith and trust. And Naaman's healing would never have happened without the intervention and faith of his wife's young Israelite maid!

The misconceptions and distorted thinking of the proud, *unconscious* commander are powerfully contrasted with the knowledge and understanding of lowly, yet *conscious* servants in this healing account. Yet, if we read on, we discover that Naaman had the humility to return to the prophet Elisha's house, acknowledging the power of Israel's God, unlike nine of the lepers encountered in today's gospel.

In the story of the Ten Lepers, we have an extraordinary description of both faith and gratitude lived out. Luke's account presents us with a *shocking* example of kingdom life in action. The ten lepers are of course outcasts – from both Samaria *and* Galilee.

Normally they weren't on great speaking terms (to put it mildly) – the Samaritans being considered irreligious and grossly inferior by the Jews. But misfortune has thrown them together – a broken yet suddenly hope-filled community of ten!

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” they cry from a distance as they recognize the rabbi-healer. They believe that this Jesus can help them.

Jesus responds with compassion to their call for mercy, sending them all – immediately cleansed - no Jordon River bathing required! - to show themselves to the priest (as was required by the law before they re-entered society).

In doing this, Jesus is returning them to a life of *inclusion* rather than *exclusion* – a life that invites participation in their communities instead of physical, social and spiritual isolation. Yet only one – the *foreigner* – ‘the irreligious’ one; praises God, and has the awareness and humility to return to Jesus, prostrate himself and give thanks. Only the Samaritan has an attitude of gratitude, an attitude that not only heals his body, but also his soul.

“Get up and go on your way” Jesus says; *“your faith has made you well.”* I wonder how Jesus felt about the other nine – his fellow Galileans? Was he disappointed in their lack of gratitude? Or did he understand the wild elation they felt as they headed off to the priest – bodily restored - without even a hint of a thank-you on their lips?

I wonder, which parts of ourselves do we perhaps hide or ‘*cast out*’, in an attempt to remain physically, emotionally, spiritually or socially acceptable...included? Are there so-called ‘blemishes’ we hide, even from God? When we have the courage and humility to bring our wounded selves to the Holy One, offering our totality into the healing arms of the Divine, we allow ourselves to be fully known...and to *know* the Loving-kindness that longs to minister to our wounds and set us free.

And what of gratitude?

God has no need of *our* “Thank-you”, but we need to become thankful people, because it is precisely when we discover the mystery of God’s freely-given love and our total need of it, that we discover ourselves and encounter God *in* ourselves *and* in each other.

I have a friend (I’ll call her Elizabeth) who has a beautiful attitude of gratitude. I’ve observed this in action. Elizabeth is quick to notice and appreciate the over-worked, the underpaid, the stressed, the tired. She is quick to offer thanks and praise to those (even strangers) who have ‘gone the extra mile’ - expressed kindness, care, compassion - bringing their full humanity to whatever their role – whether it be a health practitioner, gardener, shop assistant, service call-centre or checkout operator. Elizabeth not only expresses her gratitude to those she encounters, but whenever possible conveys her praise to their superiors or employers, thereby multiplying her blessing....and a healing, a transformation, a grace ... is bestowed on everyone involved. Gratitude flows in *every* direction and each person believes a little more, hopes a little more, blooms a little more. And the embodied Christ is present!

I recall watching a group of young children walking down the footpath, accompanied by an elderly man. The man stopped and was soon surrounded by the chattering children, as he handed out coins to each one. They raced off in delight toward the local dairy, when suddenly one little girl stopped and turned back. “*Thank-you granddad - I love you*” she shouted, before racing off to join the others.

I give thanks that God calls, claims and transforms us - and then patiently waits for us to remember, and return with grateful hearts, like the grandfather who no doubt loved *all* his grandchildren, not just the little girl who spontaneously returned shouting out her thanks and love for him.

I conclude with a reflection from Joy Cowley: The Tenth Leper¹....

¹ Cowley, Joy. *Psalms Down Under*, Catholic Supplies (NZ) Ltd. (1996) p.24