

Sermon by Fr. Steve Easterday, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Melbourne, Florida, October 10, 2010 Ruth 1:1-19 Luke 17:11-19 "Thankfulness Makes you Whole"

Giving thanks to God makes us whole. In the Gospel story Jesus heals 10 lepers, but only one -- a Samaritan -- returns to praise God and thank Jesus. Jesus told the grateful leper, "Your faith has made you well." Notice in the story that all ten lepers are healed, but that only the grateful foreigner is made well. There is a difference between being healed and being made well. Wellness means wholeness. The grateful man, the one who returned to Jesus to praise God and give thanks; this one was healed totally in body, mind and spirit. He was made whole. This man's gratitude caused him to experience a more complete life than the other nine.

I am somewhat sympathetic with the other nine. It is easy to have one thing go right in life, but still worry about the other 150 things that are not yet right. Maybe the other nine who did not return to give thanks... well maybe they had not seen their families for a long time... or maybe they needed to get back to earning money... or perhaps they longed to be able to get a good meal in the city where they had been excluded. Giving thanks for the one good thing... the healing... just did not rise in their minds to the level of all the other things they were rushing off to do. We human beings do not easily stop to give thanks. Oh... we might say "thank you" many times a day, but all too often we don't really mean it as much as we could... for our own good. Instead we rush on and lose that feeling of satisfaction and peace and gratitude that comes from truly enjoying and being thankful for the blessing that has come our way.

Did you know that in English the words "thank" and "think" come from the same root? I brought along this little wood carving of "The Thinker" to illustrate the truth that a "thinking man" is a truly "thankful man." A thoughtful man or woman who wants to have a good life, is very intentional about being thankful. A thoughtful man or woman who wants to have a good life knows that he won't just naturally fall into being thankful and so he or she makes preparations ahead of time for his or her thankfulness. Thoughtful people give thanks... and they do it very intentionally.

Traditionally the way that people plan their gratitude to God is to pledge tithes and offerings to be offered at the altar in worship. An ancient custom of giving thanks to God involves offering to God the first fruits of the harvest. This is still practiced in many parts of the world. When Pam and I lived in Nigeria, the harvest celebrations were the most important festivals of the year and they were held in October and November. It is the custom in many places to set aside a plot of ground at planting time... and then whatever the owner harvests from that plot, they give at the altar in the church at the harvest celebration. We saw many services where people would dance up the aisle bringing giant tropical yams or baskets of cassava root, or green vegetables, or even chickens and goats.

Even in the United States this kind of agricultural tithing is still practiced. When we were in Idaho, we knew of a Methodist farmer who tithed, that is he gave 10% of his income to the church for the work of God. He did it by setting aside 10% of his land for God. Whatever the profits were on that 10% of his land, that is what he gave the church. People always talked in Burley, Idaho about how that 10% of his land always yielded the best crop. Needless to say the

Methodist Church, though small, was one of the strongest faith communities in town, partly because the example of this farmer inspired others in his congregation.

The point though is not just to give... It is not even to give a particular percentage to God's work in the church. The point is to give with a thankful heart... so that your offering is an expression of your gratitude to God. Don't get me wrong, the church needs all the tithes and offerings... especially this year... but the point is not that. The point is to copy that Samaritan leper in making sure that whatever you give each week or each month or each year... that you give it with a thankful heart so that you can be well... so that you can be whole.

That farmer in Idaho who always had the best crop on the 10% of his land he used to raise his tithe... sometimes people talked about that like it was a magical blessing from fell straight down from heaven. I don't think so. I think that he just worked harder on that part of the property, because he knew that it was for God. And I believe that he wanted to offer his best... and that in offering his best... he was happy. He was thankful. He was well.

In a very real sense, pledging is simply "planned thankfulness." It is a tangible decision to live not only for yourself, but also for others... and most importantly for God. Our stewardship theme this year is this phrase, "As the Lord has blessed you, so you should give." I will just add one word to that to complete the thought for today, "As the Lord has blessed you, so you should give thanks."

Look around and see your blessings..... Give thanks for your healings. Make your thankfulness tangible in your tithes and offerings. Plan to do it. As you look to the future, expect that you will have much to give thanks for in 2011. Now let's end with the words you know well. I will call out a phrase... and you give me the response.

Lift up your hearts. *We lift them up unto the Lord.*

Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God. *It is right to give him thanks and praise.*

Yes it is. *Amen.*