

Happy Thanksgiving.

There are times in the year where it is easier and harder to feel like being thankful. And there is an obvious reason why thanksgiving was placed in October rather than February. For myself, sometimes the timing does not line up quite right to feel like Thanksgiving is on the right week, but this year it does. As of a week and a half ago, we had our last farmers market in Lanigan, we butchered our last batch of chickens and this week we delivered our last garden box after 15 weeks of vegetables to our CSA customers. As of Wednesday, I felt like I was done the season. Sure there are many more tasks, and more carrots to harvest, garlic to plant, but I've checked off a few major boxes that mark the end of the season. A natural place to pause and feel gratitude for another harvest.

The same can be felt for many of you, who garden and can see the bounty of your hard work come out of the soil and into your pantry's and kitchens. Same goes for those who grow cereal crops, and feel the joy of getting the last of the crop off the field and into a bin. In these moments thankfulness seems easy to find.

Which is precisely why Thanksgiving is not in February when we are cold, and tired of winter, the snow and the ice. For those times it's a little hard to conjure up those thanksgiving feelings.

While all of us know that we ought to be thankful, and for me to remind you to be thankful is a bit like when your mom or your spouse, after you forgot to say "thank you," prompts you with the oh-so-patient, "You're welcome." Sure, you say "thanks" then, but it doesn't quite mean the same thing.

Really being thankful is a genuine expression of gratitude — it can't be commanded — then it is no longer genuine. Think of children at a birthday party, they open a gift and much of the time their parents then remind them to go say thank you. But once in a while, the gift is just what they wanted and the thank-you's just pour out unprompted. While many of us have trained ourselves with good etiquette of saying thank you, we still all know the feeling of when the thankfulness genuinely pours out of us unprompted.

There are a few clues to how we are supposed to express our gratitude in Luke's story of the 10 lepers. It's a story we are familiar with: 10 lepers are healed, and

only one returns and it's a Samaritan no less, to say thank you. Here we immediately know which one we are supposed to be, and which one we are actually like most often. We can lift up the Samaritan as an example, but the trouble is, most of us hate examples like this, because they make us feel guilty.

What's more interesting, I think, is the fact that all ten were healed. All ten, even the nine who didn't return to say "thanks." So what made the one so different? He noticed where the healing came from. That's pretty much it. Oh, I know, he returned to say thanks once he noticed. But I think that was kind of inevitable, or even almost involuntary. I mean, once you notice something spectacular, it's hard not to say something. "I just got another grandchild." "The cancer is in remission." "He proposed; look at my ring." "I'm so excited you're here! Thanks!"

Experts on gratitude, sociologists who study our behaviour and the effects it has on ourselves and each other, say that genuine gratitude has two main parts:

First, gratitude is an affirmation of goodness, the acknowledgement that something good has happened. For the lepers in this story, it is noticing that they were healed. And for that matter, I'm sure that all 10 of them noticed that.

The second part of gratitude is figuring out where that goodness has come from. And this is where the 1 leper who returned was the different. He not only found joy in his gift of healing but he recognized where that gift came from. And then the act of returning to say thank you became an involuntary reaction. Once he realized where the healing came from, he couldn't help but turn back and share his joy and thanksgiving with Jesus.

Thanksgiving is like that. When it's genuine, it's spontaneous, even involuntary — you recognize you've been blessed and can't help but share your joy through thanksgiving.

So, the Samaritan turns back to say "thanks." He knows he's been given a gift and can't help turning around to saying something. And in doing so he's given a second gift, as he leaves his encounter with Jesus not only healed but also blessed — blessed in his own recognition of healing, blessed at being drawn into deeper relationship with the one he thanks, blessed at hearing himself commended for having great faith.

Imagine the difference that must have made in his life. He, a Samaritan, being commended by a Jewish rabbi for having great faith, faith sufficient to effect healing.

That's the way thanksgiving always works — in giving thanks for a gift given we are blessed again.

And there is science behind this two-fold benefit of gratitude as well (the combination of the gift and the gratitude.)

There is something about the nature of gratitude and thankfulness that changes us. Gratitude researchers found that people who practice gratitude consistently report physiological benefits (e.g., lower blood pressure), psychological benefits (e.g., more joy, happiness, and optimism), and social benefits (e.g., less isolation).

*“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger to a friend.”*

– *Melody Beattie*

For those with eyes to see, God's blessings are all around us. And as we give thanks for them, we notice where they come from, see our dependence on each other and on God, and are blessed yet again in the act of gratitude.

Each of us (I hope) could sit down and make a long list of things we can be thankful for,

Practices of thankfulness: -\

- Thanksgiving notebook at family gathering
- Table grace practice to be inclusive of guests and other traditions. “Thank you God for...”
- Daily Gratitude journals

-These are all practices that help us to look at the present, and acknowledge what is good. For those who struggle with anxiety, often their thoughts are stuck out of the present; thinking about what could happen in the future, and usually it's the

negative things –the mistakes, the disaster, disease, rejection, etc. Or it's stuck in the past –what I should have said, or done instead that could cause problems, make people upset, or lead to your rejection. Practicing gratitude brings us back to the present, and often also back to God, where as people of faith, so much of our gratitude is routed.

Throughout the bible we are told to offer our thanks to God. We are told not to worry about the future. We are told to put our faith in God rather than the workings of our own hands, and yet that's often where we falter. We also live in an age governed by a sense of "scarcity" and an ethos of "looking out for number one."

When we look at the wealth around the world, we can always find someone richer and more well off than ourselves, but when we are honest with ourselves, we know what we are among the wealthy of the world. I own a house, and land, and more vehicles that we have people to drive them. Yet when I am reminded of my privilege and my wealth, it doesn't bring up feelings of gratitude and thanksgiving, but rather feelings of guilt.

We have all experienced those pangs of guilt that come with the knowledge of our wealth next to our neighbours' poverty. We still have deep rooted fears of not having enough, fear of being poor. We fear the situation where there won't be enough to go around and pretty soon the pile of money that we have will begin to dwindle.

We are told all our lives to save up for our future, to save for retirement, to be ready for disaster. And I bet for those of you who aren't in the "saving up" phase of life anymore, still are saving for later, for the tomorrows ahead (I feel like this thriftiness has been passed down in my Mennonite heritage in the same way that the recipe for roll kuchen is passed on). And whether we believe it or not, we are told to count on no one but ourselves. I'm sure we have all thought about what it would be like if we lost everything.

Our guilt and fears about wealth cause us to entangle our very security up with wealth. In order to feel secure, we need money. How much money? How much is enough? Well, you never know, how long do we have? How big is that problem up

ahead? So prudence can easily slip into greed as we amass more and more, share less and less, so that we don't have to be afraid, so we can feel secure.

But imagine for a moment what might happen if we were to focus more on our gratitude than on our guilt or our fears. What might we become if we remembered to sing alleluias for our wealth?

Maybe, just maybe, we wouldn't feel that it was ours alone to hold, to hoard. Maybe, just maybe, when we see our stuff as gifts to be grateful for rather than as our possessions, we could feel a little more generous. Maybe, just maybe, we could take that advice from Philippians and "not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

This week I read an article about radical generosity. In it there was a story about a woman, Joan, who went to an international women's ministry conference where at the end of the conference a sheet of paper went around to fill in your email address to stay connected. It got to a pastor from rural Kenya who put her name "Rose" down and passed it on. The next person saw it and passed it back to tell her she forgot her email address. The woman said quietly, "oh, i don't have email, it costs so much and when it is available it's so slow and unreliable."

The list continued on around the room. But just before leaving the conference Joan was about to get into a taxi to the airport, and her friend ran back in to give something to Rose. When she got back Joan asked her friend what she gave to Rose. "My credit card" was the answer. "What you've got to be kidding. That's crazy! Why would you do that?" "So she can pay for email every month" she said matter-of-factly.

Joan realized that a gratitude for wealth has little or nothing to do with money at all. It has something to do with the way we deal with money, with what we do with it; with the manner in which we do it, with the reasons for which we do it.

The purpose of wealth should not be is not security. The purpose of wealth should be reckless generosity, the kind of generosity that sings of the lavish love of God; the kind of generosity that rekindles hope on dark days, the kind of generosity

that reminds us that God dwells in, with, and through us, and that we are God's body, Christ's hands and the Spirit's breath.

The purpose of wealth is reckless generosity.

Our alleluias, our praises of gratitude free us from guilt and fear when they are embodied in Christ and we become God's Body, Christ's hands.

At Thanksgiving, when we pause to focus on our gratitude is a great time to not only see the things around us that we are thankful for, but understand that all these things come from God. And when they are God's and not ours, we can loosen our claim on them and live into the reckless generosity that Christ's love models for us.

At the end of my growing season, can I see that my harvest is not my own doing, that God gave me the energy, focus, and knowledge to keep on going when this summer's drought was getting me down? So that this harvest is not just my harvest, but God's harvest.

Can I see that the money I have in the bank is enough for me to share, not just a token of it, but lots of it or even all of it?

Can I see that the wonderful people in my life are not there because of my great choices but because God has put them in my life?

What things in your life, do you need to give the credit and the gratitude back to God, rather than your own doing.

Can we have faith like the one leper, to notice that our joy and our healing come from God? Will we turn around to say thank you?

And lastly, can we trust in the Spirit to inspire in us to use our gratitude towards the kind of reckless generosity that transforms us into God's body, stretches God's kingdom to include the outcast and the alone, that forms us into Christ's hands and the Spirit's breath?

I encourage all of you to find ways to include gratitude in your practices, with today and this weekend of Thanksgiving, but in each an everyday as well, so that our practices of gratitude turn into living grateful lives.

*God, at Thanksgiving*

*we turn our hearts and minds to the many ways that you have blessed us in our lives.*

*And yet, many times we are like the 9 lepers who were healed, not acknowledging where our blessing came from.*

*Help us to be more like the 1 who knew the source of healing and joy to be from you.*

*Help us to release our grip on our wealth and let us become the recklessly generous people we were created to be.*

*Help us not to worry about our life.*

*Help us to not be afraid for the future.*

*May we move from a practice of gratitude to a grateful life, where we effortlessly abide in the quiet joy of God's grace, no matter our current circumstance.*

*Where rejoicing rather than worry becomes our character, and not just our practice.*

*Let our gratitude turn to involuntary alleluias*

*And share your reckless generosity!*

*Let us be Gods body, Christ's hands and the Spirit's breath now and forever. Amen.*