

July 22, 2018 - Readers' theatre & meditation
(Patricia Friesen)

Readers' Theatre – Luke 17:11-19 The Ten Lepers

Props – lepers, yellow fabric – Jesus & the disciples, baseball caps

[The lepers stand huddled under the fabric - near the chair storage cupboard.]

[Narrator stands at the pulpit.]

[Jesus & disciples enter from the bathroom area, walking slowly around the back of audience, towards the west entrance door, as Narrator speaks.]

Narrator: Jesus & his disciples were making their way toward Jerusalem. They crossed over the border between Galilee, where Jesus had been teaching – and Samaria - a province that most good Jews avoided carefully.

As they entered a village, they were approached by ten men, all lepers with a terrible skin disease.

[Lepers point at Jesus, take a few steps towards him – stay huddled under fabric – yell..!]

Lepers [together]: It's Jesus! Jesus! Master!! Have mercy on us!!!

[Jesus walks up closer to the lepers, taking a good look at them.]

Jesus: Go! Show yourselves to the priests.

[Jesus goes back to the west door, and talks with the disciples quietly.] [Lepers walk together towards the little room, but the fabric falls off as they walk.]

Narrator: The lepers went off to go see the priest, so the priest could check their skin. But while still on their way, their skin became clean – they were healed!

[Lepers stop, look at their arms. Smile, look very happy! Then walk towards the little room.] [But one leper turns around, walks towards Jesus, pumping his arms, kneels at Jesus' feet.]

Thankful leper: Thank you Jesus! Look at my skin! My leprosy is gone! I'm healed! You healed me! Thank you Jesus!

Jesus: Were not ten men healed? Where are the nine? And you are a Samaritan. Are you the only to come back & give thanks to God? Get up. Go on your way. Your faith has healed and saved you!

Meditation

Scripture texts: Luke 17:11-19; Colossians 3:14-17; Philippians 4:4-7

Theme: Gratitude – Giving thanks

Focus statement: A posture of gratitude orients us toward Jesus and the transformation he works in our lives.

Intro

Last year I read a book that had been on my list for a while – **1000 Gifts** by Ann Voskamp.

I bought a few copies to give away to friends, then a few more. I brought a copy this morning.

- Ann Voskamp is a southern Ontario farmer who home-schooled their 6 children
- she has a 'gratitude journal' and brings us along on the challenge to make a list of 1000 things for which she is thankful
- she writes with a poet's eye, with a photographer's lens
- part-way through the book, I came to believe that the author struggles with depression
- and I began to think about depression & thankfulness

Sometimes depression seems to be epidemic – or endemic

“According to the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey on Mental Health, 15- to 24-year-olds had the highest rates of mood and anxiety disorders of all age groups. About 7% of them were identified as having had depression in the past 12 months, compared with 5% of people aged 25 to 64 and 2% of those aged 65 or older.” (Leanne Findlay, Stats Canada, Jan.'17)

- some of us can benefit from anti-depressants, or from therapy or counseling for depression, or other approaches such photo-therapy

- but I believe that a habit of gratitude is good for our mental health – it's an anti-depressant without side-effects!

Why is gratitude so important?

- there is a ton of research around gratitude

- [Amin \(2014\) summarizes 28 benefits of gratitude, splitting them into 5 groups:](#) Emotional benefits, Social benefits, Personality benefits, Career benefits, Health benefits

- I'll just go through a few (it's a fun article to read!)

- Emotional benefits – gratitude can reduce envy, lead to feeling better about yourself

- Social benefits - 'Showing our gratitude to loved ones is a great way to make them feel good, make us feel good, and make the relationships better in general'

- Personality benefits - 'tend to be less materialistic, likely because people who appreciate what they already have are less likely to fixate on obtaining more.'

- Career benefits - 'Finding things to be grateful for at work, even in stressful jobs, can help protect staff from the negative side effects of their job.'

- Health benefits – decrease in blood pressure – sleep better

Why is giving thanks good for our souls?

- that is. gratitude to God specifically – what is the difference between just being a cheerful, thankful, optimistic person – and being thankful to God – what's the spiritual spin on gratitude

1) so much of what we enjoy, take for granted, is not of our own doing

- James says “the best way to get ahead in life is to choose your parents carefully”
- gratitude points us to a ‘Higher Power’ - as Christians, we identify that power as God
- maybe giving thanks to God is simply the most honest thing to do
- if my success is viewed in the light of the gifts God has given me, then I can work comfortably, confidently, humbly

2) thankfulness gives a sense of wellness & resilience even in rough times

- Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, pioneer in palliative care work with dying people said

“I’m not ok and
you’re not ok and
that’s ok”

- In the May 21\18 Canadian Mennonite mag – there was a report of a conference for Mennonite Women in Manitoba on the theme of resilience (p. 22)

- the speaker Dr. Moira Somers, a clinical neuropsychologist & professor, explained ‘that resilient people don’t need struggles & negative feelings to pass in order to feel positive emotions. They keep looking for the good, because positive emotions broaden perspective, whereas negative emotions narrow the focus.

- part of this has to do with trusting God

‘His eye is on the sparrow – and I know he watches me’

Romans 8 – nothing can separate you from the love of God

Hebrews 13 – I will never leave you or forsake you

- if my disappointments, discouragement, sense of failure are viewed in the light of God’s presence & care, I can still walk forward, on the look-out for the signs of God at work

- I brought along another older book called ‘Failure the back door to success’

3) Let’s think again about the 10 lepers

- Alissa Bender writes:

The story of the healed lepers might recall moments
when we’re not sure what to be grateful for.

Surely we can imagine the healed people who didn’t turn back

Were they thinking about the communities that had cast them out?

Or of their family members who had already died, isolated because of illness?

Or were they just focused on getting back to life as usual?

Maybe they were planning on giving thanks at the temple
without stopping and thinking about

God's healing action through this person, Jesus?

All of them were still healed.

But to the Samaritan who turns back Jesus says,
"Your faith has made you well."

This story of healing has turned into a story
of an outsider

who is welcome in God's plan of salvation.

And the Samaritan came to understand that
because he took the time
to stop and say thank you.

[Here again, perhaps] a posture of gratitude
orients us toward

Jesus and the transformation he works in our lives.

Closing

The overall theme for the summer is: Practicing faith (adapted from Alissan Bender, Leader Worship Document, Mennonite Church Canada, Summer 2018)

- There are many ways to nurture faith, to nurture shared life with God,
besides the practices of worship, study, confession, and service.

Our summer series focuses on some of the spiritual practices, or spiritual disciplines, that draw each of us into a living relationship with God.

Henri Nouwen writes that "spiritual disciplines are nothing more and nothing less than ways to create a room

where Christ can invite us to feast with him
at the table of abundance."

(Henri Nouwen, in intro to Soul Feast, Marjorie J. Thompson, 1995).

I will list again the themes for the summer because so many of us are coming & going; these are the faith practices we can continue to think about – or see in a different light – perhaps trying out something you haven't tried before:

Prayer: tuning in

Gratitude: Giving thanks

Hospitality: reaching outward, drawing inward

Scripture study: digging deeply

Spiritual companions: walking together

Fasting: making room

Celebration: enjoying life

My own faith practice wraps thankfulness into prayer

- I often write down things for which I am thankful
- and then things that I am worried about
 - often there is overlap – there is something for which to be thankful even in the situations in which I am most worried
 - often I can't even imagine any way out, any solutions, any hope, until I begin to see some small thing for which to be thankful
 - I need gratitude in the early mornings before work – even more than I need a coffee!
 - and as I'm falling asleep I'm learning to do the most simple form of Ignatian "practice examen"
 - saying one thing that happened during the day for which I am thankful
 - & one thing for which I am "less thankful"

I close with these questions:

- How are people at MFM practicing their faith?
- How are you experiencing your faith?
- How is your faith alive from day to day?
- How are we strengthened or encouraged by these practices?
- Is there something about giving thanks
 - which can open me towards Jesus
 - open me to God's working in my life?