

November 18, 2017 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Colossians 3:15-17 Always Say Thank You by Andy McDonald

Today I want us to explore two stories about saying thank you and from each story we may learn just a little about ourselves. Maybe we can get just a little bit more in touch with who we are. Understand just a bit more why we might not remember or think about or wish to say thank you. What might awaken a spirit of gratitude. And maybe even come to understand the risk of a wrong-headed thank you.

This week individuals and families all across our nation will, for a moment or maybe a little longer, focus on saying “thank you” and hopefully our exploration of these stories will make our engagement in thanksgiving richer and deeper and more satisfying.

Before we launch into these two stories let’s pray. Father, right now we want to open your word and explore two stories you had recorded in your scriptures just around 500 words apart and they are such a contrast. Direct our thoughts. Please send your Holy Spirit to not just instruct our minds but to transform our hearts by your word. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen

Our story begins by telling us that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and he was traveling along the border between Samaria and Galilee. We don’t catch the set up in this story because the turf is unfamiliar. But it would be similar to telling you that I was headed to Miami going down I4 to Tampa. I can get to Miami that way but it isn’t the fastest or most direct route. It may seem like the wrong road but Jesus has plans and purpose and there’s no rush to get there. This will be his last time to come to Jerusalem. When he finally arrives by this roundabout route he will ride a donkey into town among the masses of people arriving for Passover, what we call the “Triumphal Entry” only days before his crucifixion. He undoubtedly has what lies before him on his mind. He could have been self-absorbed, filled with his own saving the world event into which he is headed. Of course on this journey before he gets to Jerusalem there will be a stop in Jericho. He will get to meet and eat with Zacchaeus.

But we are getting ahead of our story. Jesus and his disciples enjoy the countryside. They enjoy this time together unmolested by those who have been threatening Jesus life. It almost feels safe walking in the rural areas. Up ahead they see a small village. Maybe it’s late morning and the sight of the village is the promise of lunch. Their morning walk has moved them along this no man’s land between Samaria and Galilee, they’ve about used up all the energy from breakfast and now spotting a small village ahead they begin to anticipate water from a well and some lunch there.

Just as they are approaching the village they ran into 10 lepers. Well they didn’t actually run into them. Lepers were by law were required to keep a certain distance between themselves and anyone not afflicted with the disease. If people were getting too close the lepers were to move away to avoid contaminating the healthy. They weren’t quarantined to a particular spot but were always quarantined by a required distance from people. We might better tell the story that he lepers encountered Jesus.

Undoubtedly they had heard the nearly unbelievable stories about Jesus. The rumor ran deep among the lepers that Jesus had actually touched a leper and that touch had taken the disease away, healed. Jesus had lifted the long slow leper’s death sentence. They wanted to believe these stories, these rumors, because they brought some hope.

Thiers had been a sad, gut wrenching journey. One day everything had been good. Life had it’s challenges but there was the joy of family. The couple had been matched a young age by the village match maker, and they had grown to love each other and felt that in their life partner there was someone who really got them. Time had brought the joy of children to their home. All was well until one morning he noticed just a small white-ish spot on the inside of his arm. It was no big deal. He figured it would pass but it didn’t it grew and eventually he was declared to have leprosy. He had to leave the

family, his love his wife and the kids he would die for, and go and live outside the village with the lepers. His future was declining health and death alone and separated.

This was the fate of 10 desperate men who figured out somehow, that this traveler headed into the village was Jesus. From the required distance they yelled out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us.” When Jesus saw them he felt for them. He knew they suffered not just their horrible disease but the accompanying pain of loneliness and separation from all those they loved.

He didn’t call them over and lay hands on them. He didn’t throw dust in the air and say he healed. There was only one path for a leper to step back into society. They had to appear before a priest and be examined and be declared to be leprosy free. So that’s what Jesus does. He simply says, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”

And 10 desperate men set off in search of a priest. Here they are diseased, walking and limping off to see the priest. I imagine them looking at each other and maybe one asking, “What are we doing?” The priest isn’t going to want to examine us we are a sad looking crew. But at some point on that journey as they went, they were healed.

Imagine one looks over at another and all of a sudden the white spots are gone. All of a sudden as they went new healthy flesh is generated to replace the affected areas. Whatever the effects of leprosy on their bodies it was reversed they were whole. They pick up the pace. Now they are anxious to find that priest. It is hard to believe. Too good to be true, tonight they will be back with their families. One of the ten, when he saw he was healed, stopped in his tracks, did an about face and began to run, not to the priest but back toward Jesus. He’s saying and singing and shouting praises to God and he throws himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. The Bible adds these words, “and he was a Samaritan.”

Jesus says, sort of to this guy, but really to his disciples and others who might have gathered. “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

What about the nine? They didn’t come back to say thank you. Why? Were they not filled with gratitude? Were they somehow glib about their miracle? What is it about when we are blessed, when good things occur in our life, when some unexpected benefit comes our way, what is it in our human nature that might enable us to fail to say “Thank you?”

What is it about good moments that make us afraid to acknowledge the good, what holds us back from expressing thanksgiving?

Sometimes there’s this crazy chain of thinking that can come into our minds. When something good happens, when good comes unexpectedly into our lives our scarcity thinking our scarcity mindset can kick in and cause even great stuff to have not just a pure joy but a foreboding joy.

A couple has a wonderful happy and healthy child. And another pregnancy occurs and our crazy minds can imagine that since I have all this joy from my first child something will probably go wrong be wrong be tragic with this new one.

We are all excited about a great vacation and the first few days are magically great and for some thoughts of disaster creep in, imagining bad must lie ahead because everything is too good right now.

These nine lepers are walking along and all of a sudden they are healed. I mean completely gone every small reminder of their former diseased condition. It is too good to be true. What if it comes back? Is this really permanent? What if I dilly dally going back to say thank you and miss my chance to see the priest today? Or what if going back to say thanks that along the road where it left me it returns?

Why should I have joy when there are still lepers in our country that haven’t been healed? I’m not perfect why do I get this benefit? Today we can get caught up in this why should I have joy thinking. Why should I have joy when there are sick people in our hospital? Why should I have joy when I’m not perfect? Why should I have joy when millions of refugees are homeless? Why should I

have joy when wars rage? Why should I have joy when children are starving? Why should I have joy when injustice is rampant?

The leper who returned was human too. But somewhere along his journey in life he had learned that the antidote to foreboding joy is gratitude. There is always risk. Things could turn bad. The bottom could drop out we are vulnerable. But if we want to experience joy we have to embrace the vulnerability that it might pass, but our best chance is to acknowledge how truly grateful we are for the people in our lives, the beauty of our world, the connections we have with others, or simply grateful for this very moment before us.

All the irrational fears of the nine who didn't return may well have been there for this Samaritan but he was willing to embrace vulnerability—that life necessitates both days of victory and days of defeat, and that life can only be filled with joy by engaging with it by being all in! So he sets his fears aside by enlarging his gratitude, he comes back to say thank you.

There is so much vulnerability in those two little words. They acknowledge our lack, our need, our inadequacy because we don't say thank you for things we accomplish, for how we exercised our strengths. We say thank you for what another does for us.

Properly used they are humble words that connect us with a healthy spiritual experience.

Paul asks, What do you have that you have not been given? And when we are recipients what we say is "Thank you." Our gratitude is the best way to counteract the devilish conspiracy of scarcity. Gratitude says there is enough, we are enough, thank you. You are the God who supplies all our needs according to your riches in Christ Jesus.

I guess if the first story was about the nine who didn't return to say thank you then the second story wouldn't be so bad. But in contrast with the one who returned, in contrast to the joy and benefits of saying thank you this story, this word of thanks is sad.

About 500 words after the story of the 10 lepers in Luke 18:9 he introduces or sets up the story this way: "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable." While it was a parable, just a story to teach a point, Jesus' listeners had seen similar scene played out.

Two men went up to the temple to pray. These two weren't buddies. They weren't two friends who thought they'd spend their lunch hour together in prayer. There were designate hours 9am, 12 noon, and 3pm and in Jerusalem if you wanted your prayer to be really effectual you would go to the temple to pray. So at these prayer hours there would be extra congestion in the temple where they believed their prayers would carry more clout.

Of course for those who wanted to be seen at prayer this was prime time.

Jesus said two men went up to the temple to pray, one was a Pharisee and one a tax collector.

We are extra hard on Pharisees but they were just trying to please God. The scribes would study the law, determine its meaning, and make rules about those meanings, and the Pharisees were men committed to keeping all the rules. A Pharisee considered himself to be a Jew of Jews.

The other guy was a tax collector. Tax collectors were in cahoots with Rome. They were notorious for getting wealthy by cheating and over taxing. If the Pharisees were on a top rung of the social ladder in that culture then the tax collectors were near the very bottom, at least when it came to respect.

The Pharisee stood up, and likely he stood with outstretched arms to be as noticeable as possible, and prayed about himself. I hear him drawling out that melodramatic 'Gaw-od, I thank you. Here it is the "thank you" you never want to say! I thank you that I am not like all other men—robbers, evil doers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."

The law prescribed only one absolutely obligatory fast for the Jewish people—on the day of Atonement. But if you wanted to gain special merit you fasted on Monday and Thursdays. Those fasting would whiten their faces and appear in disheveled clothes and because Monday and Thursdays were market days they could flaunt their fasting for the crowd at market.

The tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn't even look up to heaven, but beat on his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Jesus said, "I tell you that this man, the tax collector, rather than the other the Pharisee, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

There has ever been present and still is today the temptation to come to God with a supercilious, arrogant gratitude that we are not like other people but a cut above.

There is no doubt that our lives should be filled with gratitude that God has saved us by his grace alone. We should take all opportunities to say thank you to God for all the benefits that come to us with salvation that make our lives richer and fuller and more connected.

But we must forever resist the assumption that because we may be better off economically, or have a better education, or have better opportunities, or practice better habits of health or temperance that we are qualitatively "better" humans.

Paul seems to have cleared that up, All have sinned and there is no one good no one who does right. Pray to God that you would never be so deluded as to say "thank you God that I'm not like other people. We are all so much more alike than different.

We all have faults and failings. We all wish for good things for those we love. We all know what it is to feel lonely or invisible. We all know the joy of being wanted. We all know the fear of not having or being enough. We all know the draw of vengeance. We all know the joy of beauty. There is no room for us demarcating, for us praying God I thank you that I'm a little better than everyone else.

If we compare ourselves to each other that foolishness might creep into our conversation. But when we stand beside Jesus, the Son of righteousness we all together see our commonness.

William Barclay tells about going on a train through the Yorkshire moors and noticing a little white washed cottage that seemed to shine in the sun with almost radiant whiteness. A few days later on the return trip a new deep snow had fallen and when he spotted that same cottage surrounded by the driven virgin snow the cottage now compared with the snow seemed drab and soiled and almost grey.

We know all things by comparison and when any and all of humanity stand next to our savior the ludicrous of thanking God that we are not like others is evident.

So be thankful. Expressing gratitude is the antidote to foreboding joy. A heart of gratitude heals us of our pride because all we have we have received and all we can do is remember to always say Thank You!



When was a time you wished you had said “thank you” but didn’t?

Why do you think it is easier or more natural for some than others to say “thank you”?

What is the relationship between the size of the need that was met and the size of the thank you?

How susceptible are you to ‘foreboding joy’ where as soon as something good happens you wonder if it can last?

How do you see gratitude as helping with this?

In what ways is saying “thank you” a vulnerable activity?

When have you done the equivalent of saying, “thank God I’m not like other people”?

How can you distinguish between different gifts and different blessings but still equally fallen as everyone?

How will you enlarge you heart of gratitude?



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