

"A Harvest of Gratitude"

October 9, 2022
King City United Church
York United Ministries
Padre Rev. Andrew K. Lee

Prayer for Illumination

These are your words, O God. Humble us to speak their weight.
Strengthen us to hear their truth. Unbind us to live their call. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Though the fig tree does not blossom
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails
and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold
and there is no herd in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.
¹⁹ GOD, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer
and makes me tread upon the heights.

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten men with a skin disease approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine?" ¹⁸ Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

<Children's Time>

Happy Thanksgiving! Today is Thanksgiving Sunday, and we give thanks to God, who is giving us abundant life and our families, who are supporting and praying for us.

I'd like to share a short story from when I was in the CNE Navy tent. I gave small tattoo stickers to the children. Kids around 5 years old received and said, "Wow, stickers!" While they were looking at the tattoo, which was just 10 cents or so, their parents asked them: "What do you say?" Then the kids paused to think and say, "thank you!" Parents smiled and were proud of their children because of the education achieved and their attitude of obedience.

Giving thanks, and saying and expressing thanks, are important, because when you say "thank you," we share our joy and boost our love and happiness.

It is the same with the relationship with God; our gratitude in faith is a sharing of our good heart and attitude with each other. By sharing gratitude, you will have a good heart of happiness and blessing. When we express our gratitude to God, God is pleased with a smile. And lastly, when our life is full of gratitude, we will have a healthy and happy life. Your brain, your ability, your creativity, and even your physical energy will be boosted. Expressing our gratitude is so beneficial. So, my friends, I'll give you homework: No worries, it's not that hard. Find one thing of gratitude and express your gratitude to God, to your parents, to your family, or to your friends. Then you will have an abundant life with divine blessing. May the blessing of our Father God, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you today.

<Reflection>

People celebrate Thanksgiving, the season of harvest, the abundance of rich products from the ground. They gather from place to place and share good homemade foods at a big table. This gathering is not just for a particular nation but is a worldwide celebration. Koreans call this national Thanksgiving, 秋夕, meaning "The Autumn Night." Vietnamese (Tet Trung thu), meaning "Children's day," German, Erntedankfest, meaning "Feast Day," France, Toussaint, meaning "All Saints Day", and China, 中秋節 (Zhonquijie), meaning "The Midst of Autumn."

I remember one of the Autumn Nights when I was a kid. My father has 5 brothers and a sister, and they gathered in a big house to celebrate it. Everyone was uplifted because we were going to have a special lunch. The big table was set, and everyone huddled. And my father's first brother, the eldest among the family, declared: "Let's eat!" According to the order-like announcement, everyone started eating. Half of them were Christian, so they instantly lowered their head and said grace before starting. It was a very short period of time, for a few seconds, but it was clearly recognizable. One of my father's brothers, who was a non-Christian, complained right away because his son and daughters also prayed in front of the food.

"Funny guys you are! You always give thanks to God for the food, but you should know that it is I who earn the money to buy the food. So you should give thanks to me, not to God! It's so irrational!" Some nodded. Some laughed.

Realistically speaking, his logic is not wrong because he was the only person to work and earn money for his family. But we know that life cannot be well only because of my efforts and ability. If someone doesn't know this,

that person must be a childish adult who doesn't know the uncertainty of life. For example, last week, I wanted to purchase orange-coloured squashes but failed because, despite of all the farmer's efforts, they were not able to harvest them. Harvest is beyond human work.

For this reason, throughout human history, we instinctively give thanks when we harvest vegetables and fruits. But you know what? Giving thanks is not only a human response to the wondrous mystery but Christians' spiritual response to God.

And there are three stages of the Christian's spiritual response of gratitude to God. The first stage of gratitude is the gratitude for what they are receiving. When we get a present from others, we give thanks for the present. When you get something that you've prayed for, you may give thanks. Even a trouble-making child may give thanks to their parents for Christmas gifts. That is the first stage of gratitude.

The second stage is gratitude for what they received or have received for a long period of time. It is a higher stage because you have to remember what you've received. You received birthday presents last year, you received someone's heart 5 years ago, you received fortunate moments that saved your life 20 years ago, and you received parental love with affectionate protection 50 years ago. And now you remember and appreciate what you've received.

The third stage is giving-thanks to God for what we are going to receive. Giving thanks to God in advance can never be very easy because this gratitude, sometimes, is to be made in hardships: unhealthiness, poverty, loneliness, anxiety, and any type of discouraging situations. This

gratitude in the midst of suffering becomes, therefore, a radical and spiritual one because one may pray and give thanks to God for the future receiving. In the deepest spirituality, Christians may give thanks even though nothing is given, believing in God's sincerity and presence. This is what the Apostle Habakkuk confesses.

¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not blossom,
 and no fruit is on the vines;
 though the produce of the olive fails,
 and the fields yield no food;
 though the flock is cut off from the fold,
 and there is no herd in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD; 3:17-18a

Though something is not going to be given to me, I will rejoice and give thanks to God. Do not assume that this highest level of gratitude is only for the prophets in the time of the Old Testament or monks who lived in a monastery in the Middle age. Modern Christians could practise this kind of radical gratitude. Don't be disturbed or uncomfortable. I'll give you a good hint for this exercise. Whatever situation you are in, give thanks to God first. Do not start complaining or losing your anger. Just say, "God, I give you thanks!" It sounds weird, and sometimes it's awkward, but it works, I guarantee. Let's practise right now. Repeat after me please: "God, I give you thanks!" When your family members gather, please let your voice be heard out loud, saying: "God, we give you thanks!" Don't be shy and say clearly to hear your voice: "God, we give you thanks!"

Giving thanks has power. It is not just an expression towards a benevolent act. In today's gospel, Jesus is questioning: Where are the nine that I cured? This is because Jesus cured ten people, but only one person

who is Samaritan, who is considered to possess a second class status comparing the Jews, turns back to Jesus to give thanks. "Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?" Jesus speaks out loud. His voice is not low. Actually, Jesus is talking to the people around him: "Did none of them return to give glory to God except this Samaritan guy, a foreigner?" People around him are frozen. Jesus' voice is not low at all, and they noticed Jesus emphasizes the word Samaritan, whom the Jews abhor. The amazingly shocking words come right after this: Jesus slowly looks at the foreigner and says: "your faith has made you well." Look, we humans, are weak, so sometimes we have a cold. Then when we get medication, the symptom disappears. And it repeats in our lifetime. Ten people came to Jesus, and they were cured. It is great. But when the Samaritan comes back to thank Jesus, he heard about his faith that could save not only his body but his soul.

Sisters and brothers, giving thanks has power. And Christian thanks have a deeper dimension of gratitude. In the season of harvest, I hope we Christians, can harvest our heart, our faith, and our gratitude before God. And that can save you from suffering that you might have, from the power of death that we are all facing. With the wonder and awe of seasons changing, I hope you may have a wonderful happy Thanksgiving with your friends, family, and neighbours who can become more faithful because of, first, your fruits of lips and, second, of deeds. I bless all of you to have a great time of harvest of gratitude to God.