

‘Gratefulness Makes the Soul Great’

First preached by the Right Reverend Grant Lynn Ford at the Sunshine Cathedral on Sunday, November 21, 1999, preached in part by the Reverend Canon Kati Houts on Sunday, November 21, 2004. and then by Dr. Ford on Sunday, November 20, 2005., and this Sunday, November 25, 2007 (with alterations, additions and deletions from time to time).

THE WRITTEN WORD

The Light of the Ages

2 Kings 5:1-3, 9-15c (abridged)

¹Naaman, the commander of the armed forces of Aram, had leprosy. ²Naaman’s wife had a servant who had been captured from Israel. ³She said to her mistress, “If my master would visit the prophet in Samaria he would be healed.” ⁹So Naaman and his escorts took off in their horses and chariots, and pulled up in front of Elisha’s house. ¹⁰Elisha sent a messenger to tell Naaman, “Go down to the Jordan. Dip yourself seven times in the water. The leprosy will be gone.”

¹¹⁻¹²Naaman stormed away in a rage. “Well! He could have come out and waved his hand and the leprosy would have disappeared. What makes him think the waters in Israel are better than the rivers of Damascus?” ¹³But his escorts spoke up. “If the prophet had asked some heroic feat of you, you would have done it willingly. Why not do this simple thing?” ¹⁴So he did as the prophet told him, and his flesh was as clean and whole as a newborn baby! ¹⁵Naaman and his traveling party went back to Elisha. He told the prophet, “I know there is only one God, right here in Israel!”

The Light from a Teacher of Truth

Open Your Mind and Be Healed – Johnnie Coleman

You have all the faith that you will ever have. And so do I. When you are centered in faith, fear disappears. When you understand the power of faith, you will know there is nothing too hard for God. And there is nothing too hard for you.

The Light of the Master Teacher

Luke 17:12-19 (abridged)

¹²Ten men came up to Jesus, standing at a distance, ¹³shouting, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” ¹⁴Jesus said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.”

They immediately took off, only to discover that their leprosy was gone! ¹⁵One of them turned came back, praising God. ¹⁶This Samaritan threw himself down at Jesus’ feet, thanking him profusely. ¹⁷“Weren’t all ten healed?” Jesus asked. “Where are the other nine?” ¹⁸How is it that this outsider is the only one to return and thank God?” ¹⁹Then he said: “Rise and go! Your faith has made you whole!”

THE PROCLAIMED WORD

A lady was picking through the frozen turkeys at the grocery store, but couldn’t find one big enough for her family. She asked a stock boy, “Do these turkeys get any bigger?”

The stock boy replied, “No ma’am, they’re dead.”

What did you have for Thanksgiving? Something traditional?

In 1621 some 52 pilgrims and 90 natives gathered in Plymouth Colony around that first Thanksgiving meal. So what did they eat? No cranberry sauce; they didn’t have sugar in the Colony. No mashed potatoes either; potatoes still hadn’t arrived from South America. Apple pie? Surprisingly not. Apples aren’t indigenous to North America and didn’t come to the United States until years later.

The feast lasted for three days, so they ate a lot of deer, clams, dried berries, corn, wild turkeys, and fish such as cod, sea bass, and—yum, yum—eels. And you might want to remember that when they cooked an animal, the ‘humbles’ were cooked and eaten as well. We wouldn’t call them ‘humbles’; we’d call them ‘guts’.

So be grateful that you didn’t eat a traditional Thanksgiving dinner, or at least that traditions have thankfully changed!

Here in this continent the first ‘official’ thanksgiving was celebrated in 1777 when General George Washington and his army, as instructed by the Continental Congress, stopped in bitter weather in the open fields on their way to Valley Forge to mark the occasion.

But the Thanksgiving holiday has roots that go far back beyond our country’s founding, and indeed are found in almost every culture. According to research conducted by the Center for World Thanksgiving at Thanks- Giving Square in Dallas, the people of the First Nations observed many rituals and ceremonies to express gratitude to a higher power for life itself. A Seneca Indian ritual, for example, states, “Our Creator... shall continue to dwell above the sky, and this is where those on the earth will end their thanksgiving.”

Many countries in Asia for many centuries have had festivals in gratitude for the rice harvest each year. In Africa, many tribal expressions of gratitude are like this ancient prayer: “the year has come around again, great Lord of our land. Never can we thank you for your good deeds and all your blessings.”

In South America, many of the native Indian cultures contain expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving, and in modern Brazil a special public day of thanksgiving and prayer has been designated for the fourth Thursday of November

every year since 1949. In the British Isles and Europe, the harvest thanksgiving is observed in Protestant and Catholic churches with special altar decorations and sometimes decorated springs or wells.

Some authorities link the American Thanksgiving with the ancient Jewish observance of Sukkot in the fall, which expresses thanks to God for the bounty of the earth. Indeed, all the major religions in the world — Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — possess rituals, observances, and liturgies that express thanks and gratitude to a higher power for the gift of life and its wonders.

Albert Schweitzer, the famous explorer, scientist, musician and humanitarian, said: “To educate yourself for the feeling of gratitude means to take nothing for granted, but to always seek out and value the kind that will stand behind the action. Nothing that is done for you is a matter of course. Everything originates in a will for the good, which is directed at you. Train yourself never to put off the word or action for the expression of gratitude.”

Notice what he said: “a will for the good, which is directed at you.” It is God who is Good, and who directs that Good to all of us. Therefore, we may be thankful. We may develop an attitude of gratitude, and be abundantly blessed by it.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel speaks of the wonder of God’s Good directed toward us, and how we are humbled by being the recipients of that Good when he states: “Only one response can maintain us: gratefulness for witnessing the wonder, for the gift of our unearned right to serve, to adore, and to fulfill. It is gratefulness which makes the soul great.”

Rabbi Heschel hits the nail right on the head when he says, and I repeat, “It is gratefulness which makes the soul great.”

That’s the lesson we may all learn from the Gospel reading this morning. All ten of the lepers were healed of their physically-debilitating condition.

Remember the words of Jesus? “Weren’t all ten healed?” Then he asked, “Where are the other nine?”

Jesus knew that it was *their* faith that healed them. He said it right out loud to the Samaritan who returned to express his gratitude: “Your faith has made you whole!”

But Jesus also knew that the Samaritan’s healing was not a once-in-a-lifetime event; it was the beginning of a lifetime of spiritual growth and blessing. As Rabbi Heschel states: “It is gratefulness which makes the soul great.”

Why, even stubborn old Naaman went back to declare his gratitude to the prophet Elisha when he finally dipped himself in the muddy Jordan...and was healed.

There is a Chinese proverb which says: “When you drink the water, remember the spring.” It’s so simple. Life is a gift meant to be lived in gratitude.

When we live otherwise, we negate all the good that is coming our way. Then we wonder why things are always going wrong, or why God has selected us for negative things. We seldom take the responsibility for our attitudes and actions, which is the real source of negative consequences.

On the other hand, if we develop and constantly practice the *attitude of gratitude*, life simply looks and feels so much better. Circumstances may not be the best, but our attitude can even make the worst situations bearable.

Anne Frank was barely a teenager when she received her first diary for her thirteenth birthday, Jun 12, 1942. Less than a month later her family went into hiding because of the threats of the Nazis to imprison Jews in Amsterdam.

They stayed in their little hiding place for two years, when they were discovered and taken prisoner by the Nazis. During the two-year hiding period, Anne wrote and rewrote her diaries, hoping they would some day be published.

Can you imagine, then, that this young girl in such horrible circumstances could write this? “I do not think of all the misery, but of the glory that remains. Go outside into the fields, nature and the sun, go out and seek happiness in yourself and in God. Think of the beauty that again and again discharges itself within and without you and be happy.”

You see, even in the midst of World War II and the terrible scourge of the Nazis, Anne has the *attitude of gratitude*, and truly it was her gratefulness that made her soul great.

She later died of typhus and starvation in Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. Only her father survived until after the war, and he made sure her diaries were published. Anne Frank has touched the lives of many generations with the greatness of her soul.

Our souls may reach for greatness, too, when we develop the *attitude of gratitude*. The Apostle Paul wrote: “Let the Expression of Christ be the Life Force in you. Share it freely and gratefully as it overflows from you in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Sing with all your heart to God!” He also wrote: “Let your heart overflow with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Sing with all your heart to God! Make your music an expression of thanksgiving to God for everything in the name of our Master, Jesus!”

Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:20

When our mouth is filled with praise and thanksgiving, it has no room for complaint and criticism. When we speak words of thanksgiving, we create our own reality, as Anne Frank did. That reality is based on the Goodness of God and the wonder of life.

Such gratitude builds great souls. And that’s the Truth!