



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea

*The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida*

THE EIGHTEENTH
SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST

October 9, 2022

A Homily by the Rev. James J. Popham

This morning's reading from the Gospel according to Luke offers several fairly obvious teachings from Jesus. First, we need to trust Jesus. The lepers trusted that they would be healed when Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priests, so they did what Jesus urged them to do.¹ And they were healed. Lesson: If Jesus tells us to do something...we best do it.

Second, we get a lesson in self-righteousness. Only the foreigner, the Samaritan, returned to thank Jesus. That would have been shocking to Jesus' listeners. Lesson: Feeling superior to others rarely is righteous. Typically, it is self-righteous.

Third, and this is the lesson that jumps out at us, we need to be grateful for what God has done for us. And we need to express that gratitude to God.

How do we do that? The answer for us is simple. We live into our identity as Episcopalians. Why do we say that?

¹ Now let's note here that what Jesus meant by faith was not belief, but trust. To have faith in Christ is to trust Christ. Even the demons whom Jesus exorcised on various occasions believed that Jesus was divine. The lepers who approached Jesus at least suspected he was divine, but what mattered was their taking the additional step of trusting him and his instructions to them. And their trust was rewarded. They were healed of their dreadful disease. That was a dramatic example. But it suggests that in any circumstance or situation in our lives, trusting Jesus will improve the outcome. At the very least, it will buoy and sustain us as we confront the chances and changes of our lives.

Do we remember what really identifies and defines us? How we worship more than anything else defines us as Episcopalians and Anglicans. In particular, our *Book of Common Prayer*, considered “the primary symbol of our unity,”² dictates our modes of worship and, in the process, reveals the heart of our faith. Every Church in the Anglican Communion worships from their local variation of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Allowances are made for language and culture, but if we were to attend services today in any Church in the Anglican Communion, we would witness the same basic service and text we are engaging here this morning in Destin, Florida.

And we will see this morning, as we would just thumbing through our *Book of Common Prayer*, that gratitude for what God provides for us is a dominant, overarching theme. Our worship and prayers not only express our gratitude, but also remind us to be thankful to God for so many things.

Our principal service of worship is the Holy Eucharist. Do we remember that the term Eucharist itself is derived from the Greek *Eucharista*, meaning...thanksgiving? Do we notice what we call the very core of our service of Holy Eucharist? We call it, “The Great Thanksgiving,” which involves the blessings, the giving thanks for them, over the bread and wine, a title that sets that blessing apart from all other blessings because it is the way by which Christ and his sacrifice are made present to us.

How do we begin the Great Thanksgiving? With a prayer of call and response that ends with, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" and the response, "It is right to give God thanks and praise."

Whereupon the presider emphasizes again that "It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth." And after enumerating several things for which we might be grateful, the prayer concludes:

Therefore, we praise you, joining our voices
with Angels and Archangels and with all the
company of heaven, who ever sing this hymn
to proclaim the glory of your name.

And the Great Thanksgiving crescendos to the pinnacle of the entire service, when we praise God stating:

By him, and with him, and in him, in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is
yours Almighty Father, now and forever.,

And the congregation raises its voice at this peak moment in the service with a resounding "Amen." If we have been paying attention, if we have been truly engaged...that moment should take our breath away.

After all, as we are reminded in the words of the Great Thanksgiving, we have so much to be thankful for. In a portion of the Great Thanksgiving, we call the anamnesis – amnesia meaning forgetting, anamnesis meaning not forgetting –, we are reminded of God's acts that demonstrate God's grace and love for us. Today in Eucharistic Prayer B we will pray:

We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son. For in these last days you sent him to be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, to be the Savior and Redeemer of the world. In him, you have delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.

These words of the Great Thanksgiving are here as a pointed reminder of so much we have to be grateful for. We can dribble them off our tongues by rote so quickly as to pass over them. Or we can dwell on them and draw them into our hearts. And when we embrace them, our songs and sayings of praise will take on the meaning and authenticity they deserve, and we will be like the grateful Samaritan who returned to the Jesus he trusted and said thank you.

Just leafing through the prayer book reveals thanksgiving as a central to our Episcopal tradition. The word “thanksgiving” appears in our *Book of Common Prayer* over 100 times.

- The invitatory prayers of Morning Prayer include the Venite, based on Psalm 95, which prays:

O come, let us sing unto the Lord; * let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.

Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, * and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.

- And at the close of Morning Prayer, in one of our favorite prayers, The General Thanksgiving, we thank God for
 - ... all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. ... for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory....
- Next month, we will acknowledge Thanksgiving Day with a collect in the prayer book:
 - ...we give you thanks for the fruits of the earth in their season and for the labors of those who harvest them.
- In our service of Baptism, we thank God for the gift of water and the water of Baptism.
- We also have a service for thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child.
- We have a prayer in Thanksgiving for the Beginning of a Recovery.
- We have a Litany of Thanksgiving for a church.
- The Psalter contains numerous Psalms that emphasize thanksgiving to God.

- We have a whole section of Prayers of Thanksgiving that includes another form of a general thanksgiving providing insightful gratitude for day-to-day blessings, such as

... the splendor of the whole creation, ... the beauty of this world... the wonder of life, and ... the mystery of love.

... for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side.

for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us.

for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone.

- We have another Litany of Thanksgiving and prayers of thanksgiving for the Mission of the Church; For the Saints and Faithful Departed; For the Nation; for Heroic Service; for the Social Order, including the Diversity of Races and Cultures; For the Natural Order, including the Beauty of the Earth and for the Harvest; for Family and Personal Life, including for the Restoration of Health.

Now wonder our catechism calls thanksgiving a principal kind of prayer in our tradition. No wonder it is central to who we are.

And all these prayers that appear in the Book of Common Prayer are just the tip of the iceberg. They are valid and authentic, but also generic. They hardly can express all that we ought be thankful for in our own day-to-day lives.

The advertisements for fast cars warn us not to try this at home. But if thanksgiving is what we always should be about, by all means, pray prayers of thanksgiving at home. Even in days when our prayer life is sorely lacking, Jo and I at least will take hands and say “Thank you, Lord,” before each meal of the day.

And every evening at 8 p.m. or thereabouts we will pray an Order for Compline, live-streamed on our Facebook page, and at the appointed moment offer prayers of thanksgiving, typically for our children, our loving and supportive parish family, the ministries and leadership of St. Andrew’s By-the-Sea, for the healing and recovery of those who have been ill, and for the comfort and support of their caregivers, and that we have each other and that we have enough. Sometimes the list goes on.

After all, in our Prayers of the People this morning, we gave thanks to God “for the uncountable miracles and blessings in our lives.”

But even if our blessings are uncountable, remember Bing Crosby’s singing Irving Berlin’s “Count Your Blessings Instead of Sheep” in the motion picture *White Christmas*:

If you're worried and you can't sleep
Just count your blessings instead of sheep
And you'll fall asleep counting your
blessings.³

³ IRVING BERLIN, *Count Your Blessings Instead of Sheep*, Lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group.