

A THANKSGIVING SERVICE
CELEBRATING THE 30th ANNIVERSARY
OF
CROSSROADS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP FOR THE HANDICAPPED
AT
CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL NEWCASTLE 26th MAY 1991
2.30 pm

Congregation: The Handicapped and their carers.
Preacher: Rev. Victor J. Smart

Readings: Psalm 98-4
Luke 17:11—19

INTRODUCTION:

“Can you read these words?” (Holding up a placard)
“Yes!” (they shouted with one accord)
“What do they say?”
“THANK YOU!” (They called back - with enthusiasm)

Our parents had taught us to say “Thank you” from our earliest childhood.

Maybe those words “Thank You” hadn’t meant a great deal to you then; that is, until such a time as you did someone a favour...you helped them in some way, and they failed to say “Thank You”. Why; that ingratitude was possibly one of the most hurtful of your experiences – which took a long time to forget.

After listening to the lesson read to you today, from St. Luke’s Gospel, perhaps you may have wondered; how come that out of ten lepers whom Jesus healed, only one leper came back to say “Thank You!”

The answer is quite simple, really. You see, for nine of those lepers, all that mattered was a physical healing. Only one leper wanted wholeness of life and being; and he received it.

This miracle told only by St. Luke, was not recorded, merely to give another example of Jesus’ power to heal. If this was so, it would be distressing for some people who, hearing this story, and having some ailment or disability; they could well ask in despair, :Why doesn’t He heal me?”

No!...this miracle has been written to convey more importantly, a precise message that God wants you to hear. What you hear with your ears is only my voice. What you hear here – in your heart, is God’s voice: listen carefully to what He is saying to you.

(1) LEPROSY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES:

First of all I want to remind you, that of these ten lepers, nine of them were Jews; and one was a Samaritan. A Samaritan was despised by the Jews and regarded as being no more than a mere dog.

So then – the only thing which kept this group together; that is - the nine Jews and one outsider – was their common malady – leprosy! They were made to feel contagious – and unworthy of God’s love...S-o-o there was always a considerable distance between the leper and the man in the street. And also – he was refused a place in worship. These lepers clubbed therefore clubbed together...

They needed companionship; and they longed for acceptance; and a sense of dignity in their life. This is what gave them a feeling of equality.

In this state of being – one day, they saw Jesus entering a village on the border of Galilee and Samaria...Standing their distance; as sinners and unclean – they shouted out...
“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us”.

They were longing to be rid of this barrier that was robbing them of a rightful place in life and the community.

Jesus simply said to them, “Go and present yourself to the priests”.

It was part of a requirement of Jewish Law – for a leper to be examined by a priest and pronounced clean. But what about the outsider? He didn't belong to their religion. Yet he started to go along with them; and on their way – something happened...they were cleansed – and they knew it.

(2) THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER:

Now...something else happened. One of the lepers – just one – the despised one – turned round and came back to Jesus. Praising God in a loud voice...He fell on his face – a mark of respect – thanking Him. The Greek words for this, in which the New Testament was written, reads: EUCHARISTOWN OUTOW. That is – he said “Thank You” to Jesus.

Through this man's action, people in the early Christian Church – were being made aware of THEIR need to give thanks to God...And do you know how they did this as a community? – Through the EUCHARIST – that is, through the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Churches like the Anglican and Catholic Churches, celebrate the EUCHARIST – each Sunday – as a sacrifice of praise. Many churches celebrate the EUCHARIST – that is Holy Communion only once a month.

In preparation of the Sacrament, we are called upon to:

“Lift up your hearts”; and our response is,

“We lift them up to the Lord”.

“Let us give thanks to the Lord our God”.

“It is right to give Him thanks and praise” – you know – just like that leper. But why is it right?

Because God has done loving things for people throughout the history of the world – which we understand as salvation history. God has not abandoned us. He has shown His love to us through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ – and through the ministry of His Church. He makes His presence real to us in the Sacrament of Holy Communion – the EUCHARIST – the Thank You celebration. What a beautiful was to say “Thank You” to God.

(3) WHAT SAYING “THANK YOU” DOES FOR US:

What does saying “Thank You” to God, do for us?

When the leper fell at Jesus' feet and EUCHARISTOWN – and gave thanks – he said “Thank You”. Then note what Jesus said: “Your faith has made you well”.

Now the Greek text in which these words have been written, says – “Your faith has healed you”. No! It does not mean physical healing – the Samaritan had already been healed physically. In saying “Thank You” this despised one experienced a deep inner healing – that is, he entered a right relationship with God.

In this new relationship, he could face the humiliating and demoralising experience of being rejected. He could face life with a new found strength and a sense of dignity and worth. Saying “Thank You”, in terms of sheer gratitude, is the best antidote I know for depression – for feelings of isolation and unhappiness.

When we can pray in terms of the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...” and say – in the words of the chorus we all live to sing:

“I just thank You Lord for making me – ME...” we will become aware of a new inner quality of life – an eternal quality. With a deep sense of gratitude we give thanks to God for the Ministry of Crossroads which had its beginning in Newcastle thirty years ago on the steps of the Newcastle Central Methodist Mission. It marked the beginning of a movement whereby people with physical and intellectual disabilities were to become acknowledged and accepted in both church and community life

It is with gratitude that we give thanks to God for the vision of the Late Reverend John Chegwiddden, minister of the Central Methodist Mission at Newcastle; and Mr. Hilton Hayes, who, at that time, was a teacher at the Newcastle Technical College...

And for all those have given their service as leaders and helpers: and for the many churches and community interests who have opened their hearts to the disabled, over those years.

It is with a deep sense of gratitude that we have been able to celebrate Christ in a Service of Thanksgiving in such a magnificent and holy atmosphere, as we have here in the Newcastle Cathedral.

Our thanks go to the Right Reverend Lord Bishop of Newcastle – to the Very Reverend Dean of Newcastle – to members of the Cathedral Ministry who have supported this Anniversary Celebration – and the Lord Mayor of Newcastle and his wonderful wife, who have shown a dedicated personal interest in the ministry of Crossroads.

Let us pray:

Aware of the transformation that had taken place in the life of a despised Samaritan – with a sense of gratitude, praise and thanksgiving – we open ourselves to God saving presence:

“Loving God, who continues with us as One who intends fullness of life for us and all people everywhere – heal us.

May we respond to Your love in self-giving praise and gratitude, and warm thanksgiving.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN