

Sermon TUMC – Thanksgiving - October 13, 2013,

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Jeremiah 29:1-7

Luke 17:11-19

This morning I'm hoping to give you an opportunity to be grateful for a **shorter** sermon.

Let's begin with a prayerful meditation exercise:

- As you are comfortable invite you to place your feet flat on the ground
- I invite you to close your eyes
- Become aware of the rhythm of your breath (breathing in, breathing out)
- Turn your thoughts inward but to stay aware that you are within a worshipping community (breathing in, breathing out)
- When you breathe out, breathe out the matters that concern you right now (the past, the future, your present projects, the turkey)
- When you breathe in, breathe in an awareness of God's love
- Breathe out your concerns, breathe in God's love (x3)
- Now, as you continue to focus on your breath, I invite you to make an inventory of everything for which you are grateful this morning.
- Think about what you are grateful for: people, experiences, relationships, life itself
- Continue to pay attention to your breathing and to your gratitude
- Breathe in, breathe out
- When you are ready, in your own time, open your eyes and return to the room with your attention.

There is a difference between *thanksgiving* and *gratitude*, one is an act, a response and the other is an attitude and an outlook on life.

Gratitude is a choice, a position in relation to the world that grounds us in our relationship with God when there are no things or feelings involved. For a person of faith, gratitude is what sets *you* apart in a society where greed and consumption often prevail.

One of my professors at seminary (Mary Jo Leddy) wrote an excellent book called *Radical Gratitude*. In it there is a mnemonic, a motto that she uses to remind herself of a different story than the consuming world around her she would say: **Today is enough, I have enough, I am enough.**

GRATITUDE IS NOT ABOUT THINGS

I read from a reliable source (like facebook or a hand painted sign in a craft store) that said "The most important things in life are not things." (So obvious but so true)

- Gratitude is not about having good things or about being in fortunate (or privileged) circumstances. If it were, what happens to us when those things are

- lost or we find out that they came at a great cost to others? (Where's gratitude during divorce, illness, financial stress, homelessness, bodily or mental frailty?)
- Gratitude is not an economic transaction. We don't get stuff and then we pay with thanksgiving. Think about it: Why do we pray *before* meals (not after)? It's an acknowledgement of where our nourishment comes from, because it's a principle that all we have, even life itself is a gift (whether we like the menu or not).
 - When I come in to work I often greet Mike with: How's life? He responds with "better than the alternative."
 - Gratitude is about life itself, at the most basic breathing that we just did together, the fact of being given breath.

Today is enough, I have enough, I am enough.

GRATITUDE IS A CHOICE

- It's not always necessarily a feeling. Gratitude is an attitude we chose very intentionally, a change in focus often in each moment.
- In the story in Jeremiah, people were in exile as captives away from their familiar environment, waiting for it to be over, wishing they were somewhere else. But the advice they got from Jeremiah was to make the best of a bad situation, make a home for themselves, settle in and live there with integrity and contentment. Seek the wholeness and the healing (shalom) of the city of that place where we were.
- That does apply to us literally in Toronto, but also in a figurative sense. If you find yourself captive in a place where you'd rather not be, what are you going to do?
- In modern times it would sound like: live fully in this moment you have been given.
- Recently heard Tigh Nhat Hahn (elderly Vietnamese Zen master, poet, and peace and human rights activist). In very simple terms he reminded us that we do not have access to the past nor to the future, but only the moment we are living in right now. In that moment, we make a choice of whether to be happy or unhappy, grateful or ungrateful, and then we string together these moments of choosing to create string of pearls of gratitude.

Today is enough, I have enough, I am enough.

GRATITUDE RUNS COUNTER TO CONSUMER CULTURE

- Sometimes we need to step back and take a hard look at consumer culture and what it is doing to use. What does it mean to be people of faith set apart in terms of values. Walter Brueggeman calls western culture "technological, therapeutic, military consumerism." That's certainly a monstrous thing.
- If you think about it, we are constantly being presented with more wants and needs that set up a false scarcity and keep us buying things and that keep the system going. I don't have **enough** so I need to buy more.
 - My clothes aren't cool anymore, my car isn't, I'm not cool anymore.

- My current favourite advertising pet peeve, is the invention of ‘stress sweat,’ for which, of course, you need a special deodorant, because we all know that sweating is a horrible bodily function, right? You need to buy more to be someone you aren’t and to fight against your own body, for that matter.
- I can’t recycle these old rags to clean my house; I need a new and improved mop that requires me to buy refills all the time.
- My hair is not the right color so I need to get me some dye and requires me to go to the hairdresser every two weeks “‘cause I’m worth it.”
- If my kids don’t get along, so I need a bigger house. One aggravating add at O’Connor and Don Mills reads: Don’t get a divorce, buy a bigger house! (Seriously?!) Can you believe that?

We are here in our little exile to say that is a lie. We don’t need more:

Today is enough, I have enough, I am enough.

The sense of dissatisfaction puts us at odds with a sense of satisfaction and gratitude that is at the root of a relationship with God, our creator, provider and sustainer, giver of our daily bread.

(finally)

GRATITUDE MAKES US LOOK BEYOND OURSELVES

- What’s happening in that Luke story? Jesus is using his peripheral vision of caring, he’s seeing those guys way out there on the edge. “Lord have mercy,” they cried. This situation is horrible, have mercy, notice us!
- Lepers in bible times were folks that had any kind of skin disease. It could be psoriasis, pinworm, skin allergies or any kind of thing like that. Back in the days of Moses, it had been determined that such folks needed to be kept apart from others, until such time as the priest – for lack of dermatologists – could give them the all clear.
- Jesus did have mercy on all of them and sent them off to get the all clear from the priests. They were actually healed along the way, all ten of them. It was not a gratitude test, it was an act of mercy and restoration. They passed. Go you’ve been healed.
- One, a Samaritan, noticed: “Oh, my God, my rash is gone!” and since the Samaritan was not a Jew and did not have the same religious constraints, he came back praising God and to express thanks directly to Jesus. The other 9 were also healed, and probably just as grateful, they were just bound to express it in different religious terms, they chose to show that by, going to church. ☺
- I read this story differently this time around: Jesus’ response not as a reprimand, but as a friendly gesture: Hey, weren’t there 10 of you? Where are the other 9? Come on, get up, it’s your faith has made you whole.
- It’s not a gratitude test, it’s healing and restoration, an act of mercy already on the way.

- **Because the Samaritan took the time to come back and connect his gratitude with the source of his healing, he received the gift of Jesus telling him he is whole, saved, he's good to go, he is good enough.**

The devotional I subscribe to offered this up to me this morning: “At the heart of it all is mercy. Healing our leprosy, whether physical, mental or spiritual, is but an outward sign of the most radical and audacious news—the God of love living in Jesus cannot stop healing and reconciling and making all things new. Ten times out of ten, we are made new! Nine times out of ten, we do not comprehend the enormity of this amazing grace. We miss so many mercy moments, and venture forth unaware that we are being healed.

Once in a while, we not only get healed—we also GET IT that we are getting healed! With a stroke of sudden awareness we see the unfailing love in which we are encased, like new skin, leprous no more. Once in a while, thanksgiving wells up within us, bounds alongside us, laps at mercy's heels, tumbles over itself in an outrageousness of joy. Mercy heals us. One time out of ten, a tsunami of gratitude plunges us onto the shores of new life.”¹

- Gratitude is not about things
- Gratitude is a choice in the moment
- Gratitude runs counter to consumer culture
- Gratitude makes us look beyond ourselves

As you enter this time of Thanksgiving remember: Today is enough, I have enough, I am enough.

As you enter a time of thanksgiving remember: **Today is enough, I have enough, I am enough.**

¹ Kayla McClurg inwardoutward.org