

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
AUGUST 28, 2016
A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM R. FLEMING



THANK AND PRAISE GOD

JESUS WAS ON THE BORDER BETWEEN GALILEE AND SAMARIA WHEN HE WAS MET BY A GROUP OF LEPERS — TEN IN NUMBER. JEWS HAD NO DEALINGS WITH THE SAMARITANS BUT THERE WAS AT LEAST ONE SAMARITAN IN THE BAND. IN THE COMMON TRAGEDY OF THEIR LEPROSY, THEY FORGOT THEIR DIFFERENCES AND REALIZED THEY WERE MEN IN NEED. ONE AUTHORITY INDICATED THAT LEPERS MUST STAND AT LEAST FIFTY YARDS AWAY. A PERFECT PICTURE OF THE ISOLATION IN WHICH LEPERS LIVED. THEOLOGIAN ARTHUR BUTTRICK SAID: “NO STORY IN ALL THE GOSPELS SO CLEARLY SHOWS HUMAN INGRATITUDE. ONE LEPER CAME BACK TO THANK JESUS AND JESUS NOTICED THE ABSENCE OF THE OTHER NINE. IS IT TRUE THAT OFTEN ONCE WE HAVE

GOTTEN WHAT WE WANT, WE RARELY COME BACK WITH THANKS.”

OFTEN WE ARE UNGRATEFUL TO ONE ANOTHER. FEW OF US HAVE NOT AT SOME TIME OWED A GREAT DEAL TO ANOTHER PERSON. FEW OF US, AT THE MOMENT, BELIEVED WE COULD EVER FORGET; BUT FEW OF US IN THE END SATISFY THE DEBT OF GRATITUDE WE OWE. IT OFTEN HAPPENS THAT A FRIEND, A TEACHER, A DOCTOR, A SURGEON DOES SOMETHING FOR US WHICH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REPAY; BUT THE TRAGEDY IS THAT WE OFTEN DO NOT EVEN TRY TO REPAY IT WITH THANKS.

OFTEN WE ARE UNGRATEFUL TO GOD. IN SOME TIME OF BITTER NEED WE PRAY WITH DESPERATE INTENSITY, THE TIME PASSES AND WE FORGET GOD. MANY OF US NEVER EVEN OFFER A GRACE BEFORE MEALS. GOD GAVE US HIS ONLY SON AND OFTEN WE DO NOT GIVE HIM EVEN A WORD OF THANKS. THE BEST THANKS WE CAN GIVE HIM

IS TO TRY TO BETTER DESERVE HIS GOODNESS AND HIS MERCY.

LEPER GROUPS HAVE FORGOTTEN MANY RACIAL AND CREEDAL PREJUDICES. EVEN WITH HANDS AND FEET GONE, WE SEE OUR CHRIST OVERCOME WITH COMPASSION. HE LIKEWISE WAS TOUCHED WITH INSTANT SYMPATHY. THE INTERPRETER'S BIBLE SAYS "INGRATITUDE WAS A WORSE LEPROSY THAN THE PHYSICAL DISEASE. WE HAVE OFTEN TIMES HEARD JESUS' WORDS FOR HIS PEOPLE AFTER HIS COMFORTING, HIS HEALING, HIS CARING AND HIS LOVE...."ARISE, GO THY WAY, THY FAITH HATH MADE THEE WHOLE."

WE'VE SEEN JESUS' REACTION TO INGRATITUDE BUT WHAT ABOUT US? WE ARE POSSESSED WITH SO MANY TIMES WHERE THANKS AND GRATITUDE ARE APPROPRIATE AND NECESSARY, BUT NOT SHARED.

LET US THINK ABOUT THE TIMES WE SHOULD GIVE
THANKS AND GRATITUDE:

- (1) TO GOD FOR HIS BLESSINGS
- (2) IN TURN WHEN HE HELPS US TO SURVIVE
DIFFICULT TIMES
- (3) FOR FAMILIES
- (4) FOR LOVE AND CARING
- (5) FOR SUPPORT IN OUR DAILY EFFORTS
- (6) FOR GIFTS GIVEN IN LOVE
- (7) FOR FRIENDSHIPS
- (8) FOR GOD'S BLESSING AND THE SUPPORT OF
MARINERS' CHURCH, TO NAME BUT A FEW.

YES, WE ARE THANKFUL IN PRAYER AND WE ARE ALSO
THANKFUL FOR HUMAN BLESSINGS; WE ARE THANKFUL
WHEN WE DO GOOD THINGS FOR PEOPLE IN NEED. BUT
SO OFTEN WE FORGET. ALL OF US CAN BE SWEEPED UP IN
VIRTUAL TURMOIL OR OTHER THINGS IN OUR ACTIVITIES.

BUT WHATEVER THOSE THINGS ARE, THEY MUST BE SURE IN THANKING OUR GOD—AND THE PEOPLE WHO ARE AROUND US.

THE MOST REV. RUSSELL LEVENSON OF HOUSTON WROTE WHAT I THINK IS A VERY HELPFUL REMINDER OF BEING THANKFUL AND GRATEFUL:

WHEN WE OFFER OUR CONFESSION ON SUNDAY IT IS NOT JUST FOR THINGS DONE, BUT ALSO FOR THINGS LEFT UNDONE. I OFTEN FIND THAT IN MY OWN CHRISTIAN JOURNEY, JUST ABOUT THE TIME I FEEL I HAVE TACKLED ONE UNDISCIPLINED AREA OF MY LIFE WITH GOD'S GRACE. BUT I HAVE FOUND THAT ONE AREA OF MY LIFE I TEND TO DROP IS GRATITUDE. IT IS NOT THAT I AM NOT UNGRATEFUL. PERHAPS I FAIL TO BE AS GRATEFUL AS I SHOULD BE.

GRATITUDE, GIVING THANKS, OR BEING THANKFUL ARE NOT JUST THEMES THAT RUN THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE.

WE OFTEN FIND THEY ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. THE PSALMIST WRITES (PSALM 50:14). PAUL REMINDS HIS READERS, “LET US THANK GOD FOR HIS PRICELESS GIFT” AND “WITH THANKFUL HEARTS OFFER UP OUR PRAYERS AND REQUESTS TO GOD,” AND WE TRY TO ALSO “BE JOYFUL ALWAYS; PRAY CONTINUOUSLY, GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, FOR THIS IS GOD’S WILL FOR US IN CHRIST JESUS,” IT IS GOD’S WILL THAT WE BE THANKFUL FOR OTHERS.

PERHAPS THE BIG SLIP UP HERE FOR MANY OF US IN TODAY’S WORLD IS FORGETTING TO BE THANKFUL FOR THE LITTLE THINGS — A SHARED LAUGH OR GOOD CRY WITH AN OLD FRIEND; A MOMENT WHEN SUDDENLY YOU REALIZE YOUR PRAYERS ARE MORE THAN JUST SAYING WORDS, BUT A PERSONAL INTERCHANGE WITH THE ALMIGHTY; THE EPIPHANY THAT THE CARE YOU SHOWED ANOTHER REALLY COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR

LIFE. A FEW DAYS AGO, SOMEONE SENT A PHOTO OF ONE OF OUR MOMS AND HER SON IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE JUST A MOMENT OF LIGHT CONVERSATION IT IS NOT A BIG MOMENT, BUT IT IS CLEARLY A PRECIOUS ONE. THE PHOTO ALONE MADE ME ASK, "AM I REALLY AS GRATEFUL FOR THE LITTLE THINGS AS I SHOULD BE?"

THE MAYFLOWER FACED TREMENDOUSLY HIGH SEAS AND HARDSHIPS, THEY WERE EVENTUALLY BLOWN OFF COURSE ONLY TO LAND IN CAPE COD. THE WINTER AHEAD OF THEM WAS HORRENDOUS, AND BY SPRING ONLY FIFTY OF THE ORIGINAL 102 SURVIVED. MANY BEGAN TO DISCUSS THAT PERHAPS THEY SHOULD GIVE UP HOPE AND GO BACK TO THE OLD WORLD. YET THEIR HEARTY SPIRITS PREVAILED AND THEY DECIDED INSTEAD TO STAY ON AND PLANT CORN AND BARLEY.

WHEN THE ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR LANDING ARRIVED, DISCUSSION AROSE AS TO HOW IT SHOULD BE

RECOGNIZED. SOME PROPOSED A DAY OF MOURNING SO THAT ATTENTION COULD BE FOCUSED ON THOSE WHO DIED IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR AND WHOSE REMAINS WERE NOW LYING IN GRAVES FAR WAY FROM HOME. BUT THEN OTHERS SUGGESTED SOMETHING EVEN MORE PROFOUND — A THANKSGIVING FOR THE FIFTY WHO SURVIVED, THE GOOD HARVEST OF THEIR FIRST YEAR'S WORK AND BEFRIENDING THE NATIVE AMERICANS WHO COULD HAVE RECEIVED THEM WITH SAVAGERY RATHER THAN WELCOME. IT WAS AS IF THE PILGRIMS WERE ECHOING THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF AUTHENTIC THANKSGIVING. RATHER THAN FOCUSING ON WHAT THEY DID NOT HAVE, THEY CHOSE TO FOCUS ON WHAT THEY HAD BEEN GIVEN BY GOD. THEY CHOSE INSTEAD TO THINK ON ALL THE WAYS — BIG AND SMALL — THAT THEY HAD BEEN BLESSED.

PLEASE PONDER THE ROLL THANKSGIVING PLAYS IN YOUR LIFE. NOT THANKSGIVING DAY, BUT THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF THANKSGIVING. YOU CAN DO THAT IN PRAYER, MEDITATION AND IN THE WAY YOU RESPOND BY GIVING BACK OF YOUR TIME, TALENT AND RESOURCES TO YOUR PARISH FAMILY. I MIGHT EVEN SUGGEST WE PURCHASE A SMALL JOURNAL AND SPEND THE NEXT MONTH OR SO JUST WRITING THINGS FOR WHICH YOU ARE THANKFUL. AT MONTH'S END, LEAF BACK THROUGH THE JOURNAL AND SEE HOW RICHLY BLESSED YOU TRULY ARE AND YOU WILL HAVE YET ANOTHER REASON TO GIVE THANKS.

LET US WORK TOGETHER ON BEING A LOT MORE THANKFUL. MAY OUR PRAYER BE THAT OF GEORGE HERBERT, "THOU HAST GIVEN SO MUCH TO ME...GIVE ME ONE THING MORE — A GRATEFUL HEART."