

Homily for 12th October



Texts: Psalm 111, Luke 17: 11-19

Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Psalm 111: 1

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan Luke 11: 15-16

I would like to begin this sermon with one of my favourite poems by ee cummings.

i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and love and wings: and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

To me this is such a wonderful if somewhat zany expression of gratitude, but you can just feel the sincerity of it in every phrase and the joy that is being expressed as cummings revels in all

the delight and promise of a new day. The very fact that it is disjointed and without any punctuation to me speaks of the spontaneity of Cummings thoughts and thanks. Such written correctness is irrelevant when one is filled with a spirit of true thankfulness, true gratitude. Is this how any of us I wonder begin our day or indeed end our day as we look back at all the blessings and joys that every day contains if we stop to really look for them.

And here I think it's important that we recognise just what a powerful human emotion gratitude is and according to neurological research can enlighten our mind, make us feel happier and has a healing effect upon us. So wow! gratitude in itself in a way leads to more gratitude, more thankfulness. When we sing that hymn 'Come ye thankful people come' as you may well have done last week when you celebrated Harvest here in Holmbury there is surely a sense of joy simply in singing those words and an awareness of just how much we owe to God, our Creator and Father for his boundless generosity towards us. And here I make a confession that I love to go on evening walks as the sun sinks lower in the sky and as at that time there are not many people around I often find myself singing a hymn such 'O praise ye the Lord' or 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow' and in so doing find I am all the more uplifted and somehow brought closer to God, closer to the 'unimaginable you' of Cummings poem and can testify to these words of William Blake: 'Gratitude is heaven itself.'

In our gospel reading today we hear of how Jesus healed ten lepers of that dreaded isolating disease and yet only one of them, a Samaritan at that, turned back to give thanks and to praise God for this life changing healing. And this I think leads us to ask two questions the first being why did the other nine not give thanks to Jesus and praise to God? It seems extraordinary to us but then let us consider just how many things in our lives we take both for granted and as our right and never pause to give thanks or appreciate just how blessed we are. And, just thinking of Cummings greeting a new day with his words of joyous exaltation, as we wake from sleep turn on the light fill the kettle for that first cuppa, maybe even switch on the heating does it ever occur to us that these are privileges that millions upon millions of God's children do not have. Clean water from a tap, electricity, central heating, food in our shops are all too often simply taken for granted; seen even as our right, essential to our wellbeing, and it does not occur to us to offer at least a word of thanks for them of those fellow children of God who made it possible for us to enjoy them In the same way we know that there is free health care albeit we may have to wait for it and that will undoubtedly make us moan and even complain rather than simply accept the pressures under which the NHS currently labours and the very fact again that this health care offered to all is a boon denied to millions.

Those nine who simply went away without a word of thanks, a word of heartfelt gratitude for their miraculous healing were surely like us when we take so much of modern life's benefits for granted. Benefits we see as our rights rather than a huge privilege for which we should always be thankful. And here we would I think do well to remember these words of Marianne Williamson who wrote: 'Joy is what happens to us when we allow ourselves to recognize how good things really are.'

And my second question which follows on from this is why was it the Samaritan who alone turned back? The Samaritan who would have been despised and ostracised by any Jew even I am sure in the leper colony in which he and the others would have been forced to live. Why did he alone show his heartfelt gratitude? And surely the answer is that because he had known the mental pain and the heart aching hurt of being despised, ostracised, excluded and even hated he was all the more aware of the wonder of compassionate and self-affirming kindness when it was freely offered to him instead of all the unkindness of the prejudice to which he was habitually subjected. For that Samaritan the healing of his leprous disease surely ranked second to the loving care that Jesus gave to him. The very personal loving care which recognised that he was indeed a beloved child of God just as were his nine Jewish companions on that road.

So maybe after this service we can go away and reflect as to just how truly grateful we are and if we honestly appreciate with thankfulness all the God given blessings we are given. Can we recognise the wisdom of these words of Henri Nouwen: 'In the past I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous response to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realise that gratitude can also be lived as a discipline. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all that I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy. So I pray that like that Samaritan we may know the joy that comes from the discipline of expressing gratitude and echo these words of Shakespeare: 'I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks.'