



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora
October 8 2023 - Harvest Thanksgiving
Canon Paul Walker

We gather this morning to express our thanks. Thanks for all God's blessings, but particularly thanks for the seeds that were sown in the spring and have now brought forth their increase. Thanks for the bounty of the harvest that we reap from the earth. Thanks for the farmers who work so hard to plant the seeds, till the ground and harvest the crops.

We are give thanks for our farming neighbours at Gerries Market here in Elora who donated all the fruit, vegetables and flowers in this morning's display. The vegetables will all be used to make a delicious meal that will serve about 60 people this Tuesday at the community lunch. All good things around us...

Psalm 65 this morning adds beautiful imagery about expressing thanks for one particular ingredient in the process: *the rain*. It is the rain that visits the earth, waters the furrows, smooths the ridges, and makes the soil soft. The psalmist claims that it is the rain that crowns the year with goodness so that the paths drip with fatness, the little hills rejoice, and the valleys laugh and sing - all because, with the rain, the valleys and hills now stand thick with grain.

This image of the land overflowing with crops is a reminder that the rain is an essential ingredient in the

whole process - particularly after an extended season of drought.

Reaping a harvest is the result of a fine balance of so many variables that it is extraordinary that it works at all. And not just once, but every year. While some people work very hard to ensure that the balance is maintained, there are many other variables completely out of our control. Our farmers are key partners in the process, but the fundamental ingredients - the seed, the soil, the sun, the rain are essential parts of this gift of creation that we have no control over. And so we give thanks.

But if this is so obvious, then where is everyone? Why aren't more people thankful? Even Jesus asks, "Where are the other nine? Did none of them return to give glory to God save this foreigner?"

The story of the healing of the ten lepers is often told at Thanksgiving to drive home the point that like this Samaritan, we are called to return and offer thanks. As our liturgy describes it is meet and right so do at all times and in all places to give thanks unto thee. In so doing we feel like we are on the right side of the fence, that we are a little justified. If we aren't careful, a posture of self-righteousness creeps in that we aren't even aware of.

But in the story only 10% of the people return to give thanks. What about the other 90%?

That's worse than the parable of the sower, where only 25% of the seed yielded any crop at all.

So what about those other nine? Well, they weren't lazy or indifferent, they were only doing what they were instructed to do. They were instructed to go and show themselves to the priests, and so they went.

Of course they would go to the priests, because the priests had the authority, the social power, to declare them clean and restore them to the community that they had been separated from. For the lepers it is like they were stuck in an eternal state of pandemic isolation. The priests were sort of the guardians of public health. They were the equivalent of the COVID home test kit. So the fact that these nine lepers went on their way into the village to see the priest was an extraordinary act of faith. "On their way, they were made clean." The priests could declare them safe, restored, healed and fully members of the community again. For anyone to hear "go show yourselves to the priests" they would run!

So the nine didn't do anything wrong. They weren't ungrateful. They were just longing to get back together again with friends and family, like we all did after pandemic lockdowns.

But on the way a Samaritan looked down and realized he was healed. In his astonishment, rather than run to the priests as he was instructed to do, he went back

and prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. In so doing Jesus becomes identified as one of the priests. Jesus here is not only a healer, but also the One who has the authority to forgive sins *and* to fulfill the priestly role of restoring someone to their community again. "Get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well." For this leper to get up and be sent on his way was an astonishing moment of jubilation to be reconnected to his community.

There are times in all of our lives when something happens that causes us to feel or become isolated from our community. It can be a virus called grief or anger or shame that paralyzes and overwhelms us. It has the power to drive us out into the wilderness convincing us that we no longer belong.

When that happens we need someone to declare that we are clean. We are absolved. We are whole and restored. For most of us that's a long process to believe. But it's what we hear every Sunday in the liturgy. You are absolved. For the ten who went running to the priests they *all* rejoiced. They *all* gave thanks. And for one who came back to acknowledge that Jesus was the high priest, for him that was sufficient enough to know he was too was healed and restored. So get up and go your way, your faith has made you well.