



Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (C)
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
September 15, 2019
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

†May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

You may have noticed that I frequently, if not every Sunday, say “Thank you” for being here. You could be any number of other places on a Sunday morning including being at home, sipping coffee or tea in your jammies, and I am well aware of that. So, “Thank you” for being here this morning.

That “Thank you” affirms who you are and the decision you made to be here. That “Thank you” taps into something deep inside me when I express it either silently or aloud.

In a recent Harvard University article, the author wrote the following: “With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives. In the process, people usually recognize that the source of that goodness lies at least partially outside themselves. As a result, gratitude also helps people connect to something larger than themselves...”

‘In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.’ (<https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>)

So, it would seem to me that expressing gratitude in life does as much for the intended recipient as it does for the one offering the thanks. In today’s Gospel, the two parables involve giving thanks. Yes, they are about having lost something or temporarily miss-placing something, and they are about the thanksgiving offered having found that which was lost.

I believe there is an important lesson to be learned in this Gospel passage. Each of us can learn to reflect on the many blessings of our lives and especially those people in our lives for whom we give thanks. Verbally expressing ‘thanks’ can open a door to a special two-way communication, a door very much in keeping with Jesus and his way of life.

Think, if you will, about the familiar story of the woman at the well. Jesus encountered her, and by acknowledging her and being in present to her affirmed her goodness. I have no doubt that she was forever changed by that encounter.

Last week, we ‘pulled out all the stops’ with a joy-filled Celebration Sunday. At the 10:30 Eucharist, we experienced the return of the choir, the return of children all around us and a Social Hour and Ministry Fair which were just amazing. All of those things took serious commitment, planning and execution. So, please join with me in offering a huge “Thank you” for a Sunday of energy, enthusiasm and joy. Let us say “Thank you” to those who gave so much so that we could experience the grace of celebration, as we kicked-off our program year.

Today’s Gospel poignantly reminds us that sometimes it is in the losing of somethings that we come to appreciate the value of it in our lives. Some of us, perhaps all of us, have lost loved ones and friends over the years. Some of us have experienced the ending of a relationship which brought forth feelings and emotions of loss unlike any other before.

The people of the Bahamas have lost so very much because of Hurricane Dorian. People throughout the nation continue to lose former notions of safety and security. Rhetoric which tears down others is said to be increasing violence in our streets, schools, college campuses and houses of worship while bullying and racism seem to also be on the rise.

And yet, the Gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to be positive and hopeful that we can make a difference in the world. As people of gratitude, we can change our own hearts while also being catalysts of change for others. No matter what happens in life, no matter the losses in life, we are encouraged to remain positive and affirming of others. Perhaps, today's Gospel suggests that we take stock of the many blessings in our lives and give thanks.

We might not think that a single sheep or a coin is of much value. It is said that a shepherd knows every single sheep, and that sheep know their shepherd.

In the First Century, my guess is that ten silver coins were of considerable value. In today's Gospel, that which was presumed lost and then found is cause for celebration. In our lives, there are circumstances in which we experience loss, and yet, somehow, very often, another door opens. We can walk through that door to experience hope and new life and be grateful.

This fall, we are grateful for many things. Today, we are grateful to Parish Life Ministry for the upcoming fun picnic following the 10:30 Eucharist. We give thanks for that event and all the many opportunities which are ours at St. Mark's. We give thanks for Christian formation, powerful examples of doors which open for children, youth and adults here at St. Mark's. Everything we do helps to form us into followers of Jesus.

First and foremost, formation begins with worship on Sundays and Wednesdays. We are formed as disciples of Jesus through worship. We are shaped into the community of faith through the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Eucharist and the holy people of God gathered here from all parts of greater Grand Rapids. Oh and yes, we are grateful to visitors who are with us today!

We are formed and shaped as followers of Jesus through the many ministries we offer at St. Mark's, and I invite you to get involved. Take a look at the Ministry Directory to see the many opportunities available for being further formed and shaped in the Way of Jesus.

Today, we welcome Preston Marchand into the Way of Jesus in the Sacrament of Baptism. Through blessed water, consecrated oil and the powerful words, "I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," Preston will begin his journey as a follower of Jesus. There will be much rejoicing here and in heaven as Preston is sealed as Christ's own forever.

As a follower of Jesus and if baptized, you were sealed as Christ's own forever. What does that mean? What does that commitment to Christ and Christ's commitment to you mean for you? Being sealed as Christ's own is a 'big deal', for which saying "Thank you, God" is a life-giving expression of gratitude.

I invite you into a world of gratitude and thanksgiving. I invite you to reflect on the many blessings of life and to give God thanks. I invite all of us to offer thanks to God and to others. For in so doing, the rewards of gratitude and graciousness can hardly be measured. Amen.