

For a moment, let us consider...Do we have anything to be thankful for? Let us consider all that we have rather than what we do not have...a place to live, food to eat, church family, freedom to meet together, relationship with God, salvation, restoration to be who we are created to be, forgiveness. God knows us, God loves us, God wants us. Do we truly consider what we have to be thankful for? Do we consider God's generosity to us? He could quite easily turned His back on us, given up on us.

The Ten lepers in our story had something to be thankful for. Leprosy, an incurable horrible disease, which separated them from society, made them outcasts. These lepers would normally have been heard yelling, 'Unclean, Unclean' to warn strangers. Yet on this occasion on seeing Jesus they cried for help. Jesus sees them and instructs them to go to the priests and as they went they were healed. You may think, why were they being sent to the priests?? Being sent to the priest was in accordance to the law of Moses. People once cleansed were to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving for their healing. Thus them being sent to the priests indicated that they were to be healed. All of them set off to the priest as commanded and yet one turns back on realising he was healed to thank Jesus, to which Jesus says, 'Where are the other 9?'

You may be asking - Why were the other 9 criticised, after all they were doing what Jesus had said, they were going to the priest. The issue perhaps is that if they were Jews, which many people think they were, they felt it was their due to be healed. The fact is though that they failed to acknowledge the source of their healing, God himself was present with them on earth in the form of Jesus. Through failing to acknowledge Jesus, although physically healed they missed out on a relationship with Jesus. Only one received this privilege. Only one had a longer conversation with Jesus and only one was brought into being the people of God – and who was he? A Samaritan! Samaritans who were outsiders, looked down upon by Jews, and despised and yet it was he who was embraced by Jesus.

What does this mean for us today? This account of the ten lepers shows that it is possible to receive God's gracious gifts in vain, nine lepers were physically healed and yet because they did not respond personally to Jesus they were denied his mercy, salvation and a relationship with Him. Ingratitude does not necessarily deny us receiving the gifts of God but it does deny us a relationship with Jesus. For me Salvation is the ultimate thing to say thank-you for. While in Rwanda for a short time a few years ago, I was humbled when even having a cup of tea, Christians would often stop and say thank you to God for many minutes, (they didn't always know where their next one was coming from), and yet we don't always say thank-you for our meal do we?

How much more do we not give God thanks for? How can we give thanks?
Show thanks? Live thanks?

Back to the Lepers - The challenge is to be like the one and not like the nine. We are encouraged to turn back, to praise God with a loud voice giving him thanks. (Time of testimony)

How did God's people through the Bible show thanks? It was through faithful generous giving, of their time, of their gifts, of all that they were.

So here it comes, being thankful...We are committed to a Stewardship Campaign.

I'm not going to go on about it a lot and I refuse to guilt people into giving. Packs have been made for people to digest at their leisure. The church has incomings, outgoings, building projects and we are called to be a faithful community. The motivation for this Stewardship campaign isn't just because we need money, it is because it is an opportunity to review our relationship with God, to become aware of our need to be thankful and to celebrate our faithfulness.

Stewardship is a recognition that everything we have comes from God - from the world around us, to our friends and families, and our own particular talents and gifts. God has been incredibly

generous to us, and a right and proper response should be to look after what we have been given, nurture our gifts, and give back to God - joyfully rather than grudgingly.

We are not just giving to a need but rather we need to give, out of thankfulness to God.
Planned giving is part of our faithfulness and thankfulness.

I have put this sermon and stewardship campaign off many times but I have been encouraged to do one by different people from each church. Our PCC's considered some different campaigns but rejected them, hoping for something new. Jack and I have put together the packs, they aren't perfect but they are a start. My hope is we will be praying, reviewing, planning and eventually committing. There are packs for those of you who come to church to take away and digest and later one will be sent to everyone on the electoral roll. Sept 28th our Harvest festival will be a service of thanksgiving, by when hopefully we have all reviewed God's generosity and faithfulness to us and subsequently our response.