

A PURITAN SERVICE FOR THANKSGIVING November 20, 2011

Prelude

Welcome

Singing the Psalms (Psalm 136) *Let Us, with a Gladsome Mind* 59

Thanksgiving Proclamation from the NACCC *Read by*

Opening Prayer of Intercession and Thanksgiving (from *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*. Ed., Arthur Bennett. The Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle PA. 1975. Pg 99)

O Love beyond compare, Thou art good when thou givest, when thou takest away, when the sun shines upon me, when night gathers over me. Thou hast loved me before the foundation of the world, and in love didst redeem my soul; Thou dost love me still, in spite of my hard heart, ingratitude, distrust. Thy goodness has been with me during another year, leading me through the wilderness, in retreat helping me to advance, when beaten back making sure headway. Thy goodness will be with me in the year ahead; I hoist sail and draw up anchor, with Thee as blessed Pilot of my future as of my past. I bless thee that thou hast veiled my eyes to the waters ahead. If thou hast appointed storms of tribulation, thou wilt be with me in them; If I have to pass through tempests of persecution and temptation, I shall not drown; If I am to die, I shall see thy face the sooner; If a painful end is to be my lot, grant me grace that my faith fail not; If I am cast aside from the service I love, I can make no stipulation; Only glorify thyself in me whether in comfort or trial, as a chosen vessel meet always for thy use. Amen.

Activities of the Meetinghouse

Reflections on Forgiveness *from Rhiannon Jones*

“Dumb” Reading of Deuteronomy 8:7-18 *Read by*

Singing the Psalms (Ps 100) *All People That on Earth Do Dwell* 317

Reading and Exposition of Luke 17:11-19

11 While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee.

The Son of God and the Son of man walks in the places between. Jesus is the doorway and the gatekeeper (John 10:7). When we are in the boundary between belief and unbelief, between hope and despair, between love and apathy, are we willing to knock upon the door and walk through to the place Jesus constantly welcomes us?

12 As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him;

Lepers, which in Jesus' day and age would have included both the disease we call 'leprosy' and anyone with a skin disorder, were excluded and ejected from the community. They were labeled unclean by the religious authorities. They were sent outside the gates of the city and there they lived in misery and

despair. Leviticus 13 details what is required of those with skin diseases.

13and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

The question we can often ask within the Gospels is, 'Why do the outcast, the diseased and the depraved recognize Jesus as the one true master and the one who has the power to deliver mercy, but those who are trained and well-versed in the Scriptures do not?' Here, the lepers outside Samaria and Galilee stand as a model for us. How often do we call out to Jesus for mercy? How often do we respond to the call for mercy so that we might be as Jesus was?

14When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed.

Jesus heals at a distance. He does not go toward them. He does not touch them. He simply tells them to fulfill the requirements of the law and go to the priests so that they might declare them clean. Being declared 'clean' in Biblical law meant 'reintegration into the community.' Being declared 'unclean' meant ejection from the community. Jesus is telling the lepers to fulfill the Law and be integrated into the community of faith.

15Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice,

16and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.

Did all ten lepers go to the priest and upon being declared 'clean', only one returned to say 'Thank you'? Or, as they were walking to the priest, did the one leper become aware of his healing and, rather than going straight to the priest, he comes back to thank Jesus? I am not sure the timing matters. What I am sure of, however, is two things:

*First, the healing of Christ is available to us **whether we are grateful for it or not**. All ten lepers are healed in this story.*

*Second, many of us, myself included, suffer from what Jean Brookwell called '**chronic ungratefulness**'. For me, I want to be grateful, but I forget, I am doing something else and don't remember, or it just doesn't occur to me. It tells me gratefulness is an act of the will. It is a conscious thing that we act upon.*

Notice also the only one who is grateful is one who is rejected and excluded – a Samaritan. Of course, in the throes of exclusion and leprosy there is no distinction – Samaritan and Israelite alike suffer the impoverishment and despair of exclusion.

Let us ask ourselves, however, 'What motivates gratitude in us?

For what are we grateful to God in our lives, in this moment, in our relationships with one another?

Are we able to express that gratitude, because gratitude is only known in what we do in response – in word or deed?

17Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they?

We know where the nine are: obeying the charge of Christ to go to the priests. They are doing as Jesus commanded.

This question tells us this is not a story about healing so much as it is a story about giving thanks.

18“Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?”

We all would like to identify with the tenth leper, the one who returns to give thanks, and so we should. But it is also important that we reflect upon the other nine as well.

Can we give glory to God for the life we have been given? Can we give glory to God for the little things we experience?

Are we awake to the glimmers and moments of grace and healing God is seeking to shower upon us at any moment?

Who will return to give glory to God?

19And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”

We could translate this “Your faith has made you whole.” True healing, true wholeness, is not possible without gratitude, without giving thanks. Gratitude is

the only universal feeling and experience that does not have a facial expression that goes with it. In other words, the fact that you feel gratitude will never transmit to others unless you tell them or actually do something so that they know you are grateful.

There is no way for another person to know you are grateful for what you have done unless you DO something. There is no way for God to know if you are grateful unless you do or say something.

*In fact, gratitude is not gratitude unless the circuit is completed. Feeling gratitude is simply the motivation to give thanks; **the feeling is not in itself gratitude.***

20 Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed;

21 nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

The gifts of God are so much more than simply physical healing or the physical things we have been blessed with in this country and within this church. The true gift of God is that, in the coming of Jesus Christ, in his death on the Cross for us and in the gift of the Holy Spirit to us, the Kingdom of God is among us, is in our midst, is right here right now. We know it is here because Christ is here, and wherever Christ is present so also is the Kingdom of God.

Remember what Jesus proclaims after his baptism in the Gospel of Mark? He comes to Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God, which is “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news.”

We have been blessed by God in body, mind, soul and strength.

Are we grateful? How will we express our gratitude to God? Indeed, what stands between you and God right now? In order to be grateful, in order to complete the circuit of gratitude, we must turn away, we must repent from those things which keep us from God. Repentance, gratitude and being with Christ is believing the Good News. Do you believe the Good News of Jesus Christ?

Let us pray...

Prayer

O Lord, open our hearts, our minds and our entire being to the healing and wholeness you offer to us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. We are grateful for all you have given us this past year and all you will provide for us this coming year. Let us be grateful for each breath we take, for every morsel of food we eat, for every drink of fresh water we drink. Let us be mindful that there are those who struggle for breath, literally, in hospital beds, in polluted areas, in poor health, and figuratively, in stressful work, in displaced creativity and crushing relationships. Let us be mindful that there are those who struggle for food, in Somalia and East Africa, in cities around the world, and even in the wealthiest country on earth – ours. Let us be the hands that feed and the feet which bring food to those who are hungry – those who are literally starving and those who are in need of spiritual food. Let us be mindful of those who are thirsty, O Lord, thirsty for clean and filtered water, and those who are thirsty for the living water you provide. We are grateful for the opportunities you have provided for us to serve and we are grateful for the ability to gather in this place to pray. May our prayer today be an expression of gratitude for the healing and promise shared with us by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Singing the Psalms (insp. by Ps 148) For The Fruit of All Creation 379

Sermon on Remembering the Long Way

Deuteronomy 8:2 says, “Remember the long way the Lord has led you these forty years...” There in the desert, the Israelites learned that God would lead, God would provide. Moses also tells the people that God did this to test them and to humble them. Forty years. There are some of you here today who have had at least 40 years of some journey which has tested your patience and humbled you in some way.

On the cover of our bulletin is an image of John Alden. He was the first to touch land from the Mayflower after the long November journey across the Atlantic. The Pilgrims understood themselves to be followers in the footsteps of the Israelites in the desert. They saw their crossing as a kind of entrance to the Promised Land. Rather than making a nationalistic claim, I think it is better to understand that any journey which leads to freedom and possibility is an entrance to a land promised to us by God. What is important for us to understand today is that, in remembering the long way the Lord has led us upon is part of how we know gratitude for what the Lord has done for us. James tells us in his letter:

James 5:7-11

7 Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near...As an example of suffering and patience, beloved,* take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.¹¹ Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

While historically there are some issues with how the Puritans enacted their faith in the world, we cannot say the same about the Pilgrims, who may have created one of the first full democracies on earth among their small gathering. Even women and children had a voice in their community there at Plimouth Plantation. Imagine for a moment that, among all the other things they learned in their time as persecuted individuals in England, and impoverished families in the Netherlands, that what they truly came to know was the art of waiting to be fulfilled by God, the art of patience. Paul says in his letter to Timothy:

1 Timothy 1:12-17

12 I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, ¹³even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life.

Notice in Paul's words who is responsible for patience in the first place. Paul received mercy so that Jesus might show patience with him as an example to others. It is not that what we say changes another person. Our witness to others is not our doctrine or our piety or our knowledge of Scripture and theology. It is the example of patience that brings people to believe; or more appropriately, the example of Christ's patience with us. Therefore, we model patience with others. Peter says:

2 Peter 3.10-18

14 Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ¹⁵and regard the patience of our

Lord as salvation.

In the patience of the Lord is our salvation. Salvation is not dependent on us. It is dependent on God's patience with us. This is good news because it means those things we do as followers of Christ in the world are in response to what God has already done with and for us, not a working list of things we have to do to get into God's favor. God is patient, and if God is patient with you and I, then we are made to become models of patience with one another. Waiting. Patience. If you are like me, patience is limited. When my patience is done, I have demonstrated patience and now it is time for you to comply with my desires. But the fact of the matter is that when that limit comes, patience is only beginning. The moment your patience is reached is the beginning of becoming like Christ. Let me finish with what St. Francis de Sales says about "Holy Patience":

To have to see to a great variety of things is really a continual martyrdom; for in the same way as those who make a journey in the summer find the flies more troublesome and irritating than the journey itself, so the fact that one has to attend to a great many different sorts of things is in itself more troublesome than the actual load of business.

You need patience, and God will give it to you, I hope, if you make a special point of asking him, and if you make yourself practice it faithfully, preparing yourself for this every morning by particularly applying some point of your meditation to it and making up your mind firmly to keep patient all day every time you feel yourself slipping.

Do not lose any opportunity, however small, of showing sweetness of temper toward everyone. Do not trust in your industry to carry you successfully through all your affairs but only in God's help; and then rest securely in his care of you, believing that he will do what is best for you, providing that you for your part work diligently and yet without straining. Without straining and gently, I say, for violent effort spoils both your heart and the business at hand, and is not really diligence but rather over-eagerness and agitation.

How soon we shall be in the realm of eternity! And then we shall see how little all the affairs of this world amount to and how little it mattered whether they did or did not succeed; but all the same, now we pursue them as though they were great things. One day we shall in heaven see that what we clung to in this world was nothing more than a child's fancy...

Be patient with everyone but especially with yourself; I mean that you should not be troubled about your imperfections and that you should always have courage to pick yourself up afterwards. There is no better way of getting there in the end in the spiritual life than always starting all over again and never thinking that you have done enough.

(HOLY PATIENCE St. Francis de Sales Excerpted from: *St Francis de Sales, Selected Letters*)

Remember your long journey, remember our long way that the Lord has led us upon. And let us give thanks for the patience the Lord has with us, even as we show patience with one another, out of our love for God and Christ. Amen.

In response to the hearing of God's word, let us now continue our worship with our giving:

Contribution to the Church from God's Provision (The Offering)

Prayers of the People

Song of Praise

*God's Mighty Plan (see insert) to the tune of Finlandia
Words written by Brian Harden*

Blessing and Benediction

Postlude