

God's Harvest for All: Being Gratefulⁱ

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. . . . having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. ~ Philipians 1:6, 11



Pre-ample

The lectionary readings don't allow us preachers to sit comfortably at times. The first thing I did this week was grit my teeth, especially seeing it was laid on thick last week, the second thing was to consider that Jesus had/has an obnoxious sense of humour, or that Jesus is just, obnoxious, I called him a moron last week no I didn't, 'mad as a meat axe'!. So if I ever call you obnoxious don't take offence I am willing to call Jesus obnoxious, you're up there with the best.

Obnoxious because the readings are about forgiveness, sharing your worldly perishable possessions, mercy and judgement, I'm afraid to preach/talk about these things while I struggle to practice it in my own life.

In our Hebrew Scripture the reading about, Joseph — after suffering abandonment, false accusation, and years of imprisonment — forgives his brothers for sending him into a lifetime of hardship: “Do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.” The Psalmist, meanwhile, exhorts his readers to “refrain from anger, and forsake wrath,” because “fretting” over evil only leads to more evil. In his epistle to the Corinthians, Paul writes about seeds that must die before new life can grow, and reminds his readers that we cannot know ahead of time what God will do with the “bare” and perishable seeds we sow into the ground. All we can do is consent to “die” to everything that hinders new life, and trust that God will raise our dishonour and weakness into glory and power.

And finally, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus continues his “Sermon on the Plain” with teachings so stark, countercultural, and difficult, we hardly know what to do with them even now, two thousand years after he spoke them: let us listen to this reading ...

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other

also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.” And again: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

Message

In the light of those readings, the pre-ample and considering this is a day in which we give thanks for the harvest of fruit and vege and sharing of our gifts and ability's, I want to pick up a slightly different wave length on these readings that in which the German mystic Meister Eckhart is reputed to have said that if the only prayer you make is "thank you," that will suffice.

Showing gratitude saying 'thank you' is the virtue of inter-dependence, the recognition that our achievements are not fully our own, but emerge from a network of relationships that sustain and shape us, giving us the materials from which we create our experiences moment by moment.

Being grateful as a spiritual practice reminds us that all our gifts are communal as well individual. Our creativity our freedom, our ability to choose the good and noble, have their origins in forces larger than ourselves -- God, this good earth, persons who have guided, protected, inspired, and nurtured us.

In many situations we are tempted these days to circle the wagons, build a wall, intact policy of detainment, stop the boatpeople, and care only for our own kin, whether in terms of school, property, civic responsibility or international humanitarian need.

While we always have an obligation to hearth and home, our gifts and talents our hearth and home are meant to be shared with the wider community.

Gratitude, saying 'thank you' reminds us that we are in this together; that our personal fulfilment is connected with the well-being of others, including people we may never meet.

The rugged individualism, the Ed Hillary image, is really an illusion on every level of life. What is needed is innovative and responsible relatedness.

It has been noted that wealth and poverty are both attitudinal and behavioural.

Many people cry "poor" despite their apparent material and economic abundance. There never is enough money, despite their abundance, and they begrudge taxes to support schools, healthcare, and community services and note the ones who are squealing most of the latest Tax Group recommendations.

Hunger, like poverty, is behavioural and the result of choices -- we can live by scarcity when there really is enough food to go around if we act wisely both in distribution and in the creation of economic

infrastructures that encourage justice, responsibility, and initiative. We can sustain the earth by living wisely and thinking abundantly.

Being full of Gratitude saying 'thank-you' is the virtue of abundance. Gratitude looks at life in terms of possibility. It imagines a meal for a multitude in five loaves and two fish. It visualizes an old lady walking from the Far North to the cess pit of political power, a hikoi (march) to end alienation of whenua (land) and people. Gratitude believes that pausing for a moment to reach out, at just the right time, can transform a person's life.

As the adage goes, even when we didn't have money, we weren't poor: we are abundant in dreams, love, and relationships, jobs regular income and a future. As chaos theory notes, the flapping of a butterfly's wings can influence weather across the country, and so can acts of grateful generosity done over and over again influence the world we live in.

Gratitude is the gift of "yes" -- yes to life, yes to blessing, yes to God, yes to possibility, and yes to others. In an inter-dependent universe, the energy of life is constantly flowing through us, and we are constantly receiving and giving -- gratitude is the awareness that we can shape our lives to bless and heal and love out of the bounty we have received.

So, throughout the day give "thanks" -- remember those who have supported you and upon whom you depend today; notice your interchanges with others; and look for

the movements of God in every interaction. This is a wonderful life that beckons us to give thanks at every turn.

Being grateful turns us from individualism to community and to wider and wider circles of care. It is important to remember that Paul's letters, such as Philippians, were written to communities and not just individuals. Paul is imagining God's harvest emerging from a small community of faith, in which each of the members matters for the well-being of the whole. In the spirit of Paul's description of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12), the well-being of the whole and the well-being of the members are interconnected seamlessly. No one can be left behind, rejected, or neglected if the body is to remain healthy and whole. Generosity is built into gratitude because in an inter-dependent world, there is no "other" -- there is no one who is foreign to us, or ultimately separated from our well-being either as giver, cause, or receiver.

If the only prayer you make is **"thank you,"** and hold that in awe and wonder, that will be enough. And, **"thank you"** can be said over and over again not just to God for the blessings of this day, but to everyone whose life touches yours in a creative way. When we have this gratitude it opens us to new blessings, but more importantly opens our hands to bless others -- through a kind word as well as our time, talent, and treasure.

Thanksgiving Prayer

Lord, thank you for walking with us through the seasons of our lives.

For the winter, when we are held safe in your arms through the darkness.

For the hope of spring, as we are filled with new promise and life.

For summer time, full of warmth and colour

And for autumn days as leaves fall to seed new growth.

You are always with us.

Amen.

reference to BRUCE EPPERLY