

Gratitude

II Kings 5:1-17; Luke 17:11-19; Psalm 111 10/10/10

Have you ever been so grateful to another person that you can't thank him or her enough? Sometimes our sense of gratitude can be so overwhelming that there are not enough words we can say and not enough gifts we can give to express just how we feel.

I remember how grateful my niece and her husband were when their newborn daughter was given a chance at life by the miracle performed by a talented heart surgeon.

Abbey had been born with a serious heart defect. She spent several days in the neonatal intensive care unit at the hospital in which she was born and then was transferred to Milwaukee Children's Hospital for the surgery. I remember being with her parents on the day of the operation and felt their angst when they collapsed against me as she was rolled down the hall to the intensive care unit with a nurse walking beside her squeezing that big blue bulb on the ventilator. I remember their tremendous gratitude to God and to the doctor who had gotten her to that point.

There were long days and nights in the ICU with Abbey setting off lots of beeps on a lot of machines. She left the hospital fourteen years ago and has led a very normal life even though she is strung together with piano wire. She delights in writing horror stories that she sometimes sends to me for editing.

Every year, when Abbey has her checkup, my niece expresses her gratitude to the doctor who kept her child alive. She also continues to raise funds for the hospital that gave her baby such excellent care.

There have been other times in my life when I have observed the same strong element of gratitude surge through people around me.

Along with the people involved, I always find myself thanking God for what has occurred. About a month or so ago, I told you about Amy, my 38 year old friend who has been battling cancer for the past 8 years. She is still going through chemo for the spots on her lung. But she is grateful for the time she has had and wrote this in a recent email: Good news! The two spots stayed exactly the same...which I guess is the best news I could have. A sarcoma is going to do two things...grow or shrink. So there is a possibility that these nodules may not be sarcomas. Obviously, we assume the worst and they most likely are sarcoma...and would be doing chemo anyway due to the ones removed in February...but, maybe they aren't...I am so relieved... Then a bit later she wrote this:

"I told my doctor that it is my goal to be an anomaly and live beyond the metastatic sarcoma life expectancy (which is different for everyone, but regardless). He said I already was and to keep it up. With my first tumor in my leg, I should have lost my leg...didn't. Shouldn't have survived 5 yrs...did. my disease shouldn't have spread to another muscle...it did. shouldn't have spread to subcutaneous tissue in my back...it did. Took eight years to get to my lungs, normally it's less than five...never should have been able to conceive...we know that wasn't the case. Maybe they can write a paper on me." I assured her they are. That is gratitude. Please keep Amy in your prayers.

In both of this morning's stories from the scriptures, we find people expressing gratitude for being healed of a disease that, at the time, isolated them from life.

Naaman, a very great man we are told, suffered from leprosy. He was a proud man, which many are, who believe they have some sort of power. But, he listened to a little slave who had been captured in battle and decided to ask if he could go and be cured by the prophet she had recommended. Elisha was the prophet and Naaman's request was granted.

When Naaman arrived at Elisha's door, he expected the prophet to come out and greet him and wave his hand over him to effect a cure. He felt insulted when Elisha just issued instructions to him. After all, Naaman was important, all people needed to bow and to him. So, in his anger and foolish pride he almost hurt himself. Fortunately, his servants had the courage and strength to confront him and tell him that he needed to try the cure that seemed so simple and that did not play to his ego. He listened to them and realized that there just might be a way to accomplish his healing did not fit his prideful requirements. He had the grace to come down from his high horse, become humble and dip himself in the Jordan seven times. He was renewed and returned to Elisha with great gratitude. He asked for two mule loads of earth so that he might worship Elisha's God at home. He believed that Elisha's God was the one true God who had healed him. He was changed forever.

In our other story from the gospel of Luke, there were ten lepers of no great social distinction. Nine were Jews, one was a Samaritan. They believed Jesus could heal them and they cried out to him as they walked near. They were required to keep their distance because they were unclean. Jesus simply told them to go to the priest and tell him they had been healed and, suddenly they were. One returned to Jesus with joy and gratitude for being healed. It was the Samaritan, one who was despised by the Jews, yet he set aside the man-made wall that separated them and thanked his healer. Jesus blessed him on his way.

No matter who we are or what our station in life, we need to be sure that we express proper gratitude when it is needed. Some people brush us off and say, "You don't have to thank me for this." But, we do. In our world, in which people are becoming increasingly uncivil to one another, we need to be thankful for our blessings, great and small. To do this, we need to open our eyes, sometimes climb down from our high horses of pride and arrogance, the kind of horse Naaman found himself on, and simply express a simple thank you to a person who has lent us a helping hand.

Some of us tend to just keep on our way after we have been so blessed by another, like nine of the lepers Jesus encountered. But, it seems, there is always one who turns back in gratitude and makes the effort worthwhile and reminds us that kindness and caring go a long way in making this world a better place for all of us.

We need to be certain to stop in our tracks every now and then, count our abundant blessings and express gratitude to our god with whom all things are possible. Amen