

The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith

Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

October 9, 2016; the 21st Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; Psalm 66:1-11; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19.

The Walk of Gratitude

Jesus meets ten lepers on the road.

Jesus loves them; he tells them to go and show themselves to the priest,
for it was the priest who

determined if lepers had been healed.

It was the priest who would determine if they could
resume a normal life in community.

Off they go, and on the way, they realized that they have
been healed.

Nine go off with joy to the priest, but one turns back to
thank Jesus.

Now the nine were not doing anything wrong, after all
Jesus told them to go to the priest, but the one who
turned back was in tune with an even greater
call.

This one felt so much gratitude, so much thankfulness, so
much love for Jesus, that he had to walk in that love,
that gratitude, that thankfulness.

Gratitude for what God did for him, made this man turn
around and go back to offer thanks.

There is the added point that this man was a Samaritan, a
foreigner...looked down upon by the Jewish
people...Samaritans were outsiders.

Perhaps the story developed as it did, with it being a
Samaritan who went back, to show that Jesus came
for everyone, and that everyone has within them

the Godseed.

Margaret Silf, in her book the *Inner Compass*, writes of the Godseed in everyone saying,

“We began this journey of exploration by reflecting on who we most truly are at the heart of ourselves, where the Godseed is planted. It is here in the Who center that God’s dream for us is unfolding. Our lives are the space in which that dream takes shape, and our gift to God is God’s dream fulfilled.”

¹

The one healed from leprosy, who turned back, he was in touch with his Godseed, the heart of who he was, the heart of his true reality.

And being in touch with his true reality and God’s role in his life...he walked in love...he walked in gratitude...he went back and thanked Jesus.

He had to go back; it probably didn’t even feel like a choice; he was responding to love by walking in love.

Margaret Silf states that, “God’s dream in our hearts is a tender but all-powerful seed.”²

For generations, members and friends of Holy Comforter have been in touch with the dream of God, the Godseed within, calling them to be about God’s work in the world.

As I look at the footsteps on the floor, the center aisle of our church, I imagine all the people who have walked this aisle in love; I imagine all the people who have walked in love and gratitude in thankfulness for what God has done in

¹ Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*, Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999, p. 183.

² *Ibid.*

their lives.

And I see the footprint of Jesus, walking in, walking to us,
to be with us---to share with us healing and love.

There are many problems in the world and struggles in our
lives.

These things are real; today we pray and grieve for those
lost and suffering because of Hurricane Matthew.

We pray and grieve with those who suffer here because of
personal matters, the lost of family and friends.

All this is true; and God grieves with us; such is our
understanding of the incarnation...God-with-us, in it
all.

On truly challenging days or on days that are just
sort of average, considering what God has done
for us in this life, and connecting with that
great truth, is an important and always
available spiritual practice.

Being able to get in touch with our gratitude to God,
helps ground us in God's love.

In our culture of always wanting more...being told we
need more...giving thanks for life itself, the air we
breathe, the sky we see, all of creation...God's
gift to everyone of us, can be extremely
helpful.

And giving thanks for specific things, people, experiences
in our lives, puts us in touch with God who always
desires the best for us.

Thanking God for all God has done for us is a
religious thing for us, part of who we are as
Christians, but as it turns out, there are many
studies on the benefits of gratitude

unrelated to faith.

On the “Happier Human” website we read ---Gratitude: more relaxed; more resilient; happier memories;

less materialistic; increases self-esteem; better sleep;
better decision making...it goes on and on...even
more spiritual, from a website that makes a
point of saying it is not religious.³

Funny.

One can keep a gratitude journal, making a point of being
thankful for something, or more than one thing,
every day.

Like most aspects of our faith journey, the things we do as
Christians, our spiritual practices, have observable,
what might be called, practical daily
benefits...

but as Christians, we don't keep a gratitude journal
primarily because it might help us do better at work,
though it may.

We do it because we want to thank God...we do it,
because we are like the one who turns around to
thank Jesus...we do it...show our gratitude to
God, because we are connected to God...in
touch with our Godseed...or seeking to
be more in touch.

Last Sunday we talked about faith, being about action,
and we have that lesson again today---The faith that
made man well, was the action of showing
gratitude...healed him in ways beyond the
physical healing he had experienced.

God's love draws love from us, and we want to a walk in

³ <http://happierhuman.com/benefits-of-gratitude/>

love.

Being part of a church community, helps us to walk in love in many more ways than we can do on our own. The church supports us in the ministries we feel called to do, such as prayer shawl knitting, working with our food pantry, helping to educate each other and our children and so much more.

But being part of a church community and supporting the church, enables much to happen that you often won't know about...specific lives being touched, healing happening.

Our support for our church made possible what happened here last week.

A young adult came to talk with me about doing a program here.

He never heard of the Episcopal Church, and he was very surprised to find out that we support the LGBT community had have for decades...the first church in Richmond to go to Pride Fest.

He was surprised to find out that a Christian community like ours, doing all that we do, exists and that we are right here at the corner of Monument Ave and Staples Mill Rd.

It is hard to express the sense of the Spirit that I had in this encounter, which was as much a blessing for me and I hope it was for him.

Over a century ago, people turned to Jesus and gave thanks by starting our church...forming this community of love, and hope, and healing.

I hope that you have received a letter from our Stewardship Ministry, which introduces the theme for our Fall Annual Giving Campaign.

“Walk in Love” is our theme, and as the letter says:

“We invite you to hear these words as connection.

We invite you to connect with how Jesus Christ walks and moves and does and loves and gives at Holy Comforter.”

When we connect with Christ who does so much to make our lives and life as a community possible, giving thanks is a natural response.

To continue the good work we do for God through our church, we support the mission of the church financially.

Please do pray/reflect with the letter you have received; pray about what a difference you make here at HoCo and how God is calling you to respond to God’s healing love this year.

Amen.