

“Expressing Gratitude”

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A young woman teacher explains to her class of small children that she is an atheist. She asks her class if they are atheists too. Not really knowing what atheism is but wanting to be like their teacher, their hands explode into the air like fleshy fireworks. There is, however, one exception. A little girl has not gone along with the crowd. The teacher asks her why she has decided to be different.

"Because I'm not an atheist."

Then, asks the teacher, "What are you?"

"I'm a Christian."

The teacher is a little perturbed now, her face slightly red. She asks why she is a Christian.

"Well, I was brought up knowing and loving Jesus. My mom is a Christian, and my dad is a Christian, and my grandparents are too, so I am a Christian."

The teacher is now angry. "That's no reason," she says loudly. "What if your mom and dad were idiots.

And what if your grandparents were idiots. What would you be then?"

She paused, and smiled. "Oh, I guess I'd be an atheist!"

Now this little girl was very grateful for her Christian parents.

Did you know:

- More Americans grow up with both parents
- Less physical toil
- More leisure time
- Cleaner air and water
- Higher literacy rates and of course
- More cable channels than ever before?

Average families – even with \$4.00 a gallon gas - now enjoy privileges until recently reserved for the rich:

- Access to college
- Long life expectancies
- Fancy vacations
- Home ownership
- Central air-conditioning and
- Two cars in the garage.

So declares Gregg Easterbrook in his book The Progress Paradox.

But he goes on and asks, “Why do so many walk around scowling, rather than smiling at their good fortune in being born into the present generation?”

Studies are finding that people are happy if they are optimistic, grateful and forgiving.

This morning I want us to consider just one of these findings – Gratitude.

How grateful are you? Friends, this is not an idle question, for it impacts on your happiness, on how you live your life!!

So, how grateful are you? Could you stand a little improvement on the gratitude scale? Today, in our nation there is concern that the majority of people in fact are not filled with gratitude, or for that matter - possess even 1/4 of a tank of gratitude.

The way and ways we are treating each other is disturbing to many of us. Instead of Gratitude, rude quickly comes to mind. Our manners are at an extremely low count according to many Americans.

In this our democracy, we are struggling for a foundation, common ground - to live together in peace and security.

And - I am convinced Gratitude makes a difference. How you view your life, will impact on how you live it.

And Gratitude is paramount!

Gratitude recognizes - you are not alone. To be grateful requires someone other than yourself. There is a reciprocity in Gratitude.

From the simplest of manners - of basic civility, “Please,” “Thank you,” “Pardon Me,” - to how we respond to someone who cuts us off on the highway - the civility of Gratitude and manners are needed for community to exist!

There is serious concern about America’s declining consideration for one another.

A poll commissioned by “US News and world Report” found that 78% of Americans regard the lack of civility as a serious problem.

9 out of 10 said we are less civil than 10 years ago.

Perhaps one way of beginning this process is to consider what degree of impact an attitude of gratitude will produce.

Being grateful for your life,
your family,
your work, (or at least having a job)
your friends,

your community,
your Country, will help direct the way you live!

Being grateful to God will guide your life.

Speaking of gratitude, civility and manners, I recently read about a book entitled,

"How Rude, The teenagers' Guide to Food Manners, Proper Behavior, and Not Grossing People Out." "The evolution of table manners can be quite fascinating. For example, when forks were first used for eating in Tuscany in the 11th century, they were condemned by the clergy. This was because food was seen as a gift from God. Only the human hand, another of God's creations, was fit to touch it."

You see, some of our children are just trying to behave more like God's children. Can you imagine?
"Jimmy, would you please pass the mashed potatoes?"

"Thank you dear" (as scrapes the potatoes from his fingers).

This book lists the Top 10 manners, as voted on by both adults and teens.

1. Say "Please," "Thank you," "You're welcome," "May I," and "Excuse me."
2. Write thank-you notes.
3. Look people in the eye.
4. Clean up after yourself.
5. Respect adults.
6. Don't interrupt. Wait for your turn to speak.
7. Treat people as you would like to be treated.
8. Use good table manners (wait to begin; chew with your mouth closed; etc.)
9. Give people a firm handshake.
10. Have compassion towards others.

Doesn't this litany sound like a Gratitude builder? (Of course much more is needed, but not a bad list for children, and perhaps adults.)

As you know, we are not the first people to address this issue of gratitude - with its corollaries - civility and manners. And - we will not be the last.

Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem. As he and his friends were trekking to the Sacred City they were walking near the border of Samaria.

Jesus and his friends were Jews, living in Galilee - which borders Samaria. But all was not well between the Jews and Samaritans. Basically, they hated each other.

There was a long history of disdain, and in Jesus' day - the anger and superior attitude of the two groups was still hot.

Well, Jesus is entering a village and he is met by 10 lepers, 10 diseased men. They all stood at a distance and cried out to him “Unclean, Unclean”! You see they knew what was expected of them. These diseased men had to live outside the community (for fear of others being diseased) and they had to warn anyone coming near that they were “unclean.”

Granting the communal and social underpinnings of this behavior - I cannot but wonder about these poor souls - ill and separated from their own community, their own families.

Can you imagine yourself in such a situation - cut off from loved ones - sick in body and alone in soul?

Ten hurting, poverty stricken, lonely human beings - each one crying out, words that elicit shame and exile - Unclean! Unclean!

The 10 cry out to Jesus for mercy. Who would not cry for such solace? Jesus sees them and tells them to go and show themselves to the priests.

You see, Jesus knew his catechism. If someone recovered from this disease, he/she first had to go to the priest to certify that he is indeed clean. Only then could he reenter the life of the community.

And as those poor, destitute men journey to the priests - they are cleansed - they are clean.

What happens next?

They realize they are no longer lepers. And one of them, one of them, when he sees what has happened - turns around and goes back to Jesus. He falls to his knees and thanks Jesus. This man was filled with gratitude! Of course! “Of course!” you say. Look what happened to him. Who wouldn’t - be filled with gratitude and give thanks?

Who wouldn’t - indeed!

Now Jesus was not slow on the uptake. Jesus asks - “Friend, were there not 10 of you?”

Where are the nine?!

Where are the nine?!

I can’t help it. This is an extremely powerful parable, story. My God, how can anyone hear this story and not be challenged and a bit bothered?

Where are the nine?!

And how sly - the one, the only one who returned - turn around - went back and expressed Gratitude was what?

A Samaritan!

Do you get it? The only one to express Gratitude was one not of our kind!

What an indictment!

It would be like today, no Christians returning to give thanks, but the town agnostic does.

Not one Presbyterian church goer returns, but a _____ does.

I'm having a problem filling in the blank - to make my point, because names I would use are names I readily accept as children of God, as indeed do many, most of you.

Fill in the blank - and shock yourself!

All ten had reason to be filled with Gratitude! But - the outcast (even for lepers), the one on the bottom rung of the social ladder - is the only Grateful one!

Where are the Nine?!

Where are the Nine?!

Where are we?!

Where am I?!

Where are you?!

Where are the nine?!

Take this story with you this morning - Don't let it lay dormant. Test it. Tease it. Try it.

God, how we need, need Gratitude! We can learn Gratitude, through the very ones that we would so easily dismiss. Don't let go of Jesus' question - Where are the Nine?!

Express gratitude!!

Amen.