

Barrowden Harvest: 17th Sunday of Trinity  
Colossians 3; 12 – 17

12Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Luke 17; 11- 19

11Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

14When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

15One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

17Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Harvest Festivals are about giving thanks for the produce of our farms.

Agriculture is the oldest and most fundamental industry, without our farmers we go hungry – or don animal skins and revert back to being hunter gatherers. In our advanced technological

world we perhaps forget that human life is reliant on a few inches of top soil, clement weather, and the annual sowing and reaping of food stuffs.

We have virtual reality, E mail, E commerce, Bit Coin, and the Metaverse, but no one yet has invented virtual food or E eating.

We are as reliant on the soil, and the grace of God, as our earliest ancestors.

Giving thanks is good for us, it reminds us of what is important, it uplifts our spirits, it gives us a more positive attitude to life, and giving thanks actually makes us more generous.

One of the reasons for going to Church is to cultivate a thankful response to the good things in life, and let that thankful response encourage us to be generous with others.

Church is a place for lamentation, and for thanksgiving.

The problem is 'what if you don't feel particularly grateful?'

Do I then have the unappealing task of trying to convince you just how lucky you really are? Of telling you that you really ought to be grateful?

And what if the Church does not make you feel particularly thankful?

The Church can breed counterproductive disgruntlement, especially I find the Established Church, with it's signature blend of bureaucracy, institutionalised liturgy and robed hierarchy.

Very often disgruntlement with the church can, on reflection, actually prove to be the presenting feature of a disgruntlement with God, but not always, the Church does let people down sometimes.

Mozart knew this well from his troubled relationship with his first employer, Archbishop Colerado of Salzburg, who proved to be a wholly unreasonable autocrat. Mozart had the good sense to distinguish between the perfect grace of God and the imperfect realisation of that

grace in the person of Archbishop Colerado. We hear this in a letter Mozart wrote to his father,

‘Always remember, as we do, that our Mufti Hieronymus Colerado is an idiot, but that God is compassionate, merciful and loving’.

Despite the frustrations of his immediate situation Mozart clearly had not lost sight of the greater theological context, ‘that God is compassionate, merciful and loving’.

Gratitude, like prayer, has the effect of raising our eyes from the apparent disorder and distress of our daily lives and causes us to focus on the Kingdom of Heaven, on the work of God in this world.

Ingratitude has the opposite effect, I recall a staff meeting at a college I once taught at, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the staff Christmas dinner. Unfortunately management and staff relations were at an all time low and the atmosphere was belligerent. The Chair made some tentative festive suggestions only to be met with a long silence from all around the table, a silence at length broken by a long serving lady of great weight both in physique and character who leaned forward and said with such finality, ‘we’re not going to do Christmas this year’, that it proved to be the end of the meeting.

The inability of the assembled people to break through the gloom of despondency and find any reason for gratitude meant Christmas was indeed cancelled that year, and of course it was they themselves who lost out.

As a contrast let me tell you another story.

During my Theology Degree I spent a few weeks on placement at a city centre Minster, the Vicar there, had recently returned from Africa. He told me of an astonishing display of gratitude he had witnessed in a small village church.

This was an African village of such poverty that they had to wash surgical gloves in the river to be reused for the next patient. The church was of an open construction somewhat like a barn; the service was recognisably Anglican up until the ‘Offertory’, the part where the collection is taken up and presented at the altar. At this point the exuberance of the people broke all bounds, they celebrated noisily as they gave their gifts to God. People who had no money to

offer had brought chickens or vegetables, with these gifts each danced up the Nave and left their gifts with the Minister.

The poorest were clearly bringing to God all that they had.

After the service the Minister deducted what was necessary for the running of the church and then distributed the rest to the needy. Some got back what they had given, some even got more, but ask yourself, would you be willing to part with the little that you have trusting in the generosity and wisdom of your local clergy?

If you need to learn how life-giving gratitude is, then visit an African Church.

If you need to see how destructive ingratitude is then look about you at our own society. On the way back from the Airport this Vicar who had been so moved by the thankfulness and generosity of the African Church had to listen to a taxi driver moan and complain about every aspect of his first world life, including not being able to get the particular brand he liked at his local supermarket. This mild mannered and peaceable Vicar told me it was all he could do not to slap the driver.

Gratitude allows the blessings of God to flow into your life; ingratitude is like a silted up waterwheel, the blessings of God still flow, but the tangle of ingratitude around the mill wheel prevents it from turning.

It is not just that we can become blind to the blessings we have, we can actually close down the possibilities for future blessings – like my colleagues cancelling Christmas at the College.

It can be hard, sometimes gratitude requires an act of the will rather than a feeling of the heart. This sermon is as much an appeal to reason as an appeal to sentiment.

Decide to be grateful and possibilities will open up.

In our reading from Colossians Paul encourages his readers to be thankful for what God has done for them, to respond to the generosity of God by living a generous life, and in our gospel

reading we heard Luke's account of the healing of ten lepers, and of how only one returned to thank Jesus.

God does not ask us to give thanks to Him because he is grumpy, but because He knows it is good for us to do so. God receives our praise as a loving parent receives a toddler's crayon picture; it is not that the fridge needed decorating with a crudely drawn stick man, it is that the parent is delighted, and most certainly does not want to bring up a child who does not know how to say 'thank you'.

Even the most magnificent Cathedral built in praise of God is like a toddler's crayon picture to the Almighty. However, a splendid church building like ours should encourage our gratitude, we have received an historic testimony built in stone to the faith of those who have gone on before us.

This building is a testimony in stone to the living stones of the church past, offered up in trust to us and to those who will come after us. We stand and worship in a greater perspective. So with them, and with Paul, I say to you,

'...whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him'.

Amen.