

“Thank you.” Two small words; a simple sentence that makes such a difference; it brings joy to our hearts; it brings joy to the heart of Jesus.

And yet, “thank you” is a statement we rarely hear. We long to hear it; the depth of our longing is revealed by the power of our response; it means something to us to be told “thank you.” Oh, we’ll make all the appropriate noises, “No problem,” “don’t worry about it,” “Think nothing of it.” But deep down, we think something of it; a warm glow is kindled in the depths of our being when we’re told, “thank you.” A warm glow that keeps us going through many a dark night of the soul and sustains our spirit in the gale winds of “what have you done for me lately?”

“Thank you” makes a difference and it makes us different; it is the response of a disciple. “Thank you” empowers us and equips us to overcome the spiritual erosion and corrosion caused by great expectations. We perceive what God is doing and receive the many gifts God is continually giving us when we choose to live with an attitude of gratitude expressed in ways as simple as saying, “Thank you.”

✠ Zombies in the Distance

Zombies seem to be “in” this year. A few years ago, thanks to the “Twilight” and “Underworld” sagas, vampires and werewolves were all the rage, but now, movies like “Zombie Land” and “Warm Bodies,” are breathing new life into the living dead.

Zombies don’t say “thank you.” They are driven by insatiable need; they cannot enjoy what they have because it’s never enough.

Does that sound familiar? Are you a zombie – metaphorically speaking of course?

Do zombies appear in the Bible? A werewolf does; his name is Nebuchadnezzar to whom God says through Daniel: *Daniel 4:16 (NRSV) Let his mind be changed from that of a human, and let the mind of an animal be given to him. And let seven times pass over him.* As for vampires, there is that business in Genesis about Adam and Eve’s son, Cain, the first murderer, who spilled his brother’s blood and is given a mark by God that prevents anyone from killing him; could he be the precursor to Dracula?

So perhaps there are vampires and werewolves in the Bible, but what about zombies? I offer a qualified, “yes,” because the plight of lepers is similar to that of zombies; they live in the distance; they inspire disgust, revulsion, and rejection; they are continually in

need. In their own way, they are the living dead.

Luke shows us a typical scene as Jesus and the disciples are traveling, 10 lepers in the distance see Him and cry out, *Luke 17:13 (NRSV)* “*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*”

Jesus sees them; he doesn’t pass them by; he doesn’t turn away; he doesn’t reject them. He sees them, and he says to them, *Luke 17:14 (NRSV)* “*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*” *And as they went, they were made clean.*

Opinions differ as to what happened next; some folks say that all 10 lepers were healed and that was that; others say that only the leper who said “thank you” was truly healed; his faith saved him; the other 9 missed their moment because they were ungrateful and did not believe.

Ah yes, it’s that classic spiritual conundrum: Are we saved by grace alone, or does our response to grace matter? Do we have to say to God, “thank you?”

What if there is a kernel of truth in both points of view? What if all 10 lepers were truly healed but only one saw it, only one knew he was healed and experienced the gift he’d been given? What if the other 9 didn’t know it, and in their anxious desperation to get to the priests before the effect of Jesus’ blessing wore off, they developed some new rash that prompted the priests to reject them, judging them, “Unclean! Unclean!” What if more simply, they went through the rest of their lives wondering if they were really, truly clean?

Does that sound familiar? Are you a leper? Are you a zombie?

✠ Gratitude Returns to Life

Our worship will continue this morning after the benediction; we will have our annual meeting in which we look back and see what God has done in our midst. Can we be grateful to God and to one another? Can we say “thank you,” or will we allow great expectations to become “what have you done for me lately?”

This doesn’t mean that it’s wrong to have expectations and to hold one another accountable to them. One of the gifts of the Presbyterian way of being a Christian community is that it provides a means by which we hold one another accountable: The pastor is accountable to the Session; the Session is accountable to the congregation; the Deacons are accountable to the Session; pastor, session, and congregation are

accountable to the presbytery; checks and balances all the way.

Thank God for that; seriously, thank God for that, because this is a gift that helps all of us grow “in the knowledge and love of God and of Jesus Christ His Son.” Rightly exercised, accountability can return us to life.

So as reports are presented (and thank you in advance to our leaders who labored so diligently this past year and in these past weeks in writing these reports!) it is right and good to state expectations, but let us recognize not only the expectations that weren’t met but also the ones that were, even the ones that were exceeded.

And, please, for God’s sake, and even more so, for our sake, say, “thank you.” Keep your eyes and ears open to recognize and rejoice at God’s work in our midst. Let gratitude return us again and again to the One Who is “the way, the truth, and the life,” so that we may go our way for our faith has made us well; our God-given faith has saved us.

One writer described it this way: “Here is a barometer of spiritual health: If gratitude is not synonymous with faith, neither response to God is separable from the other. Faith, like gratitude, is our response to the grace of God as we have experienced it. For those who have become aware of God’s grace, all of life is infused with a sense of gratitude, and each encounter becomes an opportunity to see and to respond in the spirit of the grateful leper.¹”

Two little words; “thank you,” a simple statement that makes all the difference and that make us different. God gives us so many opportunities to say, “Thank you.” Be on the lookout for them. See the grace of God at work all around you and in you and in us. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude so that when (not if – when) “God sheds His grace upon thee,” we’ll see it. We’ll know it. And we’ll thank God for it. No more wandering in the distance like zombies; offer the response of a disciple – gratitude. “Thank you.” Amen.

¹ R. Alan Culpeper, *Luke*, in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. IX, eds. Leander Keck, et al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995) 328.

