

Leviticus 25.8-19; Psalm; 33.1-12; Luke 17.11-19

Lord God, give us that a due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

On this Harvest Thanksgiving we give thanks for the land, for its yield, its abundant provision, for our fill that we may continue to live securely in the land as we heard in the Book of Leviticus regarding the Jubilee year. On this Harvest Thanksgiving we celebrate together God's goodness and sovereignty as captured in words from Psalm 33.

"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm."

On this Harvest Festival we give thanks to God guided and informed by the picture of one of ten lepers turning back and prostrating himself at Jesus' feet in thankfulness.

Only this week an associate, a friend in fact of our church community, someone on the way to becoming a member, witnessed to me quietly how in her personal tragedy she has discovered thankfulness through the process of drawing close to God and thereby becoming aware of the many blessings that are hers despite her loss. Today we as God's people are to be thankful or should it be necessary learn or rediscover thankfulness. We are called to count our blessings. Being appreciative of our blessings, being thankful for them turns the believer back to God and to the world.

The etymology of the Hebrew word from which our word Jubilee is derived as in Jubilee year is fascinating. The Hebrew means something like the "year when the ram's horn is blown." And as some of you might remember I enjoy blowing the ram's horn. Here it is. I won't blow it this year, unless encouraged by you! Last year it even made someone jump. In the first Greek translation of the Bible this word is translated as "a trumpet-blast of liberty", because the Jubilee year is characterised by the freeing of Hebrew slaves and prisoners, of debts being cancelled, of property rights being restored and the mercies of God being made manifest. I imagine this blowing of the ram's horn as tearing open all that is hidden from our sight that we may see more clearly. We must learn thankfulness. We must blow the horn metaphorically.

Something we at Christ Church have been committed to over the years as people turned both to God and the world – these do not cancel each other out – is the giving of our harvest produce to the Missionaries of Charity, as well as giving from our sharing budget to Vinzirast and the soup bus Canisibus, and in the latter years to s'Häferl the soup kitchen with a difference by providing both financial assistance and important a host of volunteers coordinated by Alexander Rösch. By the way the Diakonie, the sponsor of s'Häferl this year fully refurbished the soup kitchen. I mention these signs because if we nurture gratefulness, if we learn to know ourselves as blessed, we will inevitably be turned to God and the world for which Christ died that we and the whole of creation might have life, might trumpet liberty, might become holy as God is holy. This being

turned to God and the world whilst being attentive to God's direction today can and often is challenging.

The Jubilee year as a concept is difficult to grasp, but I am fascinated by the connection between the land, the yield/the produce of the land, a people and time. Time is something we explored a little last Sunday, although not explicitly, as we thought about the keeping of the weekly Sabbath, of the Sabbath year (every seven years), while pointing to the Jubilee year after seven times seven Sabbath years. We are to be holy as God is holy and to regard the land as holy for it is of God. Wholeness in God is the aim and so it must touch on time, on space as represented by the land, on a people and God. These are intertwined, if we stay with the text, its perplexities and its otherness. Not only is the land holy because it is of God, but time itself is to be regarded and holy.

Let me end by turning to Jesus' encounter with the ten lepers as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem. This pericope is characterised by thankfulness and where to bring and offer it. "Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him."

Did you happen to notice where Jesus is in this pericope? He is travelling between Samaria and Galilee. He is between two countries. *Er ist ein Grenzgänger*. You might say he is in no man's land. In him the boundaries that set us apart are blurred and collapse. To my mind this unique geographic reference in the Gospels is not incidental. It is crucial.

During Jesus' earthly life there were two functioning temples. One belonging to the Samaritans located on Mount Gerizim. This temple belonged to the Jews who were not taken into Babylon captivity, while the other belonged to those who were, and who on returning from captivity rebuilt the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus' instruction, "Go show yourselves to the priests!" is ambiguous. Are these ten lepers, these ten outcasts all Samaritans? Are they all Jews? Are they a mixed bag of Samaritans and Galileans and possibly others? We don't know is the straightforward answer, but the picture of Jesus in a borderland can serve as an interpretive tool.

There a few things we can say. If they are all Samaritan lepers it doesn't stop them from appealing to Jesus for mercy. They recognise him as what? A prophet? A righteous man? A holy man? In addressing him as Master they make an appeal to him to have mercy on them. And he does have mercy on them... from a distance. Is Jesus exercising caution knowing that some forms of leprosy are contagious, as we are being called to exercise caution today? It only dawned on me what a strong image this is. It is a Gospel for our time.

"The Samaritan prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him." Today's Gospel serves as a reminder to us that we must learn thankfulness, learn to be turned to God in thankfulness, to have thankfulness written on our hearts. I was reminded of the General Thanksgiving which urges us to bless God for all the benefits of this life, which urges us to be unfeignedly

thankful meaning to be that we may show forth our praise not only with our lips, but in our lives.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, ... we bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. **Amen.**