

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost. 29 July 2018. Stewardship Thanksgiving Sunday.

How tall is a 'thank you'? How deep is a hug? How wide is a smile? How long is a kiss? Paul used those size metaphors to speak about the thing in his life for which he was most thankful. Love. What greater gift is there? What is there for which we could be MORE thankful?

Paul and John wrote about love all the time. Not Paul McCartney and John Lennon, though they did too. I mean Paul and John from the first century. If we were to cut out all the times they used the words for love from their letters and from John's gospel then we would have pages full of holes fluttering in the wind. Love. And when they wrote about love they were, of course, writing about the love of God. That love for us, in us, wrapped around us IS the greatest gift.

It was never just about saying though "Isn't it nice that we are loved?" It was always "see what effect that love has on us". Paul wrote to the Ephesians, in the passage we read today, that what he wants for us is "that Christ may dwell in (y)our hearts." (Ephesians 3:17) What effect does that have? What does it DO to us when Christ is there? Quite simple, we are changed. Our perspective is different, ESPECIALLY, when we are thankful for Christ being there in us. All those expressions about love, every encounter we have with love (thanks, hugs, smiles and kisses) become even bigger, deeper, higher, longer.

Last week, celebrating Mary Magdalene, we were reminded that what we are called into is intimate relationship with someone who loves us, knows us as we are, warts and all, and loves us as we are. Where does that take us? It takes us deeper into life. We are loved. so, ... then ... what happens next? We choose what happens next and how we make that choice is affected by our attitude. It is also affected by whether we celebrate that presence of God in our lives even if everything is not sweetness and light and positive.

Being thankful, expressing gratitude, is a choice. Henri Nouwen, one of the most profound spiritual writers of the last part of the 20th century, wrote "Gratitude as a discipline involves a conscious choice. I can choose to be grateful even when my emotions and feelings are still steeped in hurt and resentment." There are lots of reasons why, even when we grasp something of what it means to be loved, we may still hold back. There may be unfinished and unresolved issues. We may still be looking for the level of response from God that we feel we deserve. Unanswered questions can be a real drag. And yet ... should gratitude wait for everything to be finally clear, sorted, perfect? Being grateful is a choice. We choose that positive way of embracing life because actually everything is always unfinished and still unfolding.

So, we celebrate this Thanksgiving Sunday today even when we still have no real idea how, as a community, we have responded to the invitation and the challenge before us. But we are offering thanks for what IS while we look forward to what is yet to be revealed. The first and most important act of thankfulness is for each other, for being here, for being here together.

Being Thankful as 'work-in-progress' goes not only for the analysis of what financial and other resources will be available to us as we move forward but it stands for each of us as well. We don't wait to be thankful until everything is done and dusted. It is a choice. It is an act of faith in response to being loved. It is an approach to life which opens us up to be able to see in ways we cannot do when we are only looking down. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who certainly

had a lot to complain about with the struggles and pressures in his life, wrote: “It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich!”

Did you hear what happened in our gospel reading today? (John 6:1-21) Notice what Jesus did with that young boy’s lunch. He gave thanks. He didn’t do a stocktake or analysis before being thankful. He took what was and gave thanks. (John 6:11). His act of thankfulness opened the hearts of others around him. Thankfulness is infectious. One of the ways of interpreting what happened in that moment was that the generosity of the young boy, and the spirit in which the gift was received and shared, opened the hearts of others who also had their lunch tucked under their cloaks. When gratitude and generosity come together we find that there is not only enough, but the cup runs over! Gratitude and generosity are interwoven responses in love, to love.

On this Thanksgiving Sunday, what are we actually thankful for. Each other. Being here. The love of God which infuses our lives. That we are most likely to go home to a lunch more varied and filling than small loaves and tiny fish. That we live in such a glorious place. That we have been so amazingly blessed with resources and opportunities. For health, at whatever stage our health is! For life, however much of it we have left on this earth. There is so much to be thankful for.

When I found the picture which I put on the front of our Worship Booklets this morning I thought ‘ouch!’ It is quite a challenge. “What if you woke up today with only the things that you thanked God for yesterday?” It is a reminder that swirls again into our lives to be thankful and awake and aware.

Take a moment right now. Turn to someone close to you and share with each other one thing for which you are thankful. At least one. Keep going if you want to until I ring this bell. But share the things in your lives for which you are thankful.

Celebrate those things. Cherish those things. Share those things. Be aware and conscious and deliberate in doing all you can WITH the things for which you are thankful.

How tall is a ‘thank you’? How deep is a hug? How wide is a smile? How long is a kiss?

Merci. Danke. Terima Kasih. Gracias. Arigato. Shukran. Do je. Xie xie. Efcharisto. Toda. Spasiba.

However we say it, however we show it, ‘Thank you’ reshapes our thoughts and minds and perspective. Be thankful. Without limits.

Gracious and loving God, touch our hearts, open our hearts to the breadth and length and height and depth of your love. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Amen.

Paul Mitchell