



"Ten Lepers Healed" By Brian Kershisnik

Christian Writer Annie Lamott says her two favourite prayers are....

in the morning: 'Help me, help me, help me'.

And in the evening: 'Thank you, thank you, thank you'.

I seriously respect Annie Lammott. 'Help me' and 'thank you' are two of the hardest things to say. Perhaps particularly in our Western World.

They both require us to acknowledge that we are not superheroes, that we are not all-holding, all-solving, all-capable. That sometimes we need a helping hand, a bit of extra strength, healing and hope. Often we are so overwhelmed with all we are trying to hold; with the ever-ongoing demands of everyday life with all its different kinds of challenges, that we don't realise how much we need or how much we receive.

And if you read Annie Lammott's writings about her life you will know that she has experienced all sorts of really tough and challenging times.

But strangely enough, it's often when we find courage to say 'help me, help me', that we also find ourselves, as she did, saying 'thank you, thank you'. And sometimes... when we say 'thank you'... that we find ourselves more able to say ... 'help me'.

Saying help me, and thank you are both things that bring us into relationship with the person to whom we speak. Whether that's God, or the love of God in each other. Or simply the wonders and graces of the natural world God blesses us with. And in relationship we find strength.

They might not be easy things to say, but both can be *choices* that we make, and if we have courage to do so, will help us to grow in life, faith, and community.

There is an ancient faith practise of habitually saying thank you – yes, habitually, like a habit we wear, a clothing of thankfulness – of looking for three things each day where God has met and blessed us.

It is so easy to get caught up in focussing on our struggles and challenges. Especially when life is very hard. And often too that's when we draw up the drawbridge, in an attempt to Keep On Managing. We can have a mis-conception of self-reliance that leaves us shut off from the possibility of joy and gratitude, as we exhaust and isolate ourselves, trying to source everything within ourselves.

It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God¹ says the BCP. At all times and places - in times of hope and times of challenge; at the tomb on Easter Day, and at the Cross on Good Friday. *Though the night will overtake this day*, says our Eucharistic Prayer, *you summon us to live in endless light*. There is a light of hope and love that is everlasting -that runs through all experience.

I remember beginning a class assembly by wondering what we could give thanks for that morning. There was a crashing silence. We went through some of the small experiences of the day - breakfast – the physical joys of cold milk, crunchy toast – and on to heart-blessings - friends who had shared hugs or smiles –the encouragement of teachers, and the sharing of celebrations. Slowly, we discovered God within the small things, and in sharing about what we were thankful for, we also discovered and shared our needs – why had we needed to be thankful, or found ourselves so – and we found within the hard things, and within the sparkly, the presence of love and hope.

It is often in finding our need, that we find thanksgiving

- and through thanksgiving that we recognise our needs

- and in both that we start to glimpse the source of our gift,
and the place of strength in our need.

¹ Preface of the Great Thanksgiving prayer in the BCP Holy Communion Service

As S. Paul says in our epistle reading today, we give thanks because we know that God is working within our needs and sharing with us his joys - *if we have died, we know we will also live with him, if we have endured, we find we will also reign*. Learning to give thanks is about learning to be vulnerable, and learning to be vulnerable leads to discovery of shared strength. That we are not on our own. That we have God and we have each other. This is really what Christian Community is all about, and why the heart of our Church faith is the Eucharist (the Greek word for Holy Communion that means 'thanksgiving'). The thanksgiving that binds us all together in common need at the table of God, and where we meet his grace. In joy, and in the broken things.

On the night before he died, Jesus took the bread and the wine, and gave thanks. This is my body and blood, broken, he said. Even there in amongst the broken things, the blood the sweat and the tears, Jesus says, we can give thanks, because he is there, and he will take us with him through Friday to Sunday...

It's a beautiful story, our gospel today; the healing of the double outcast - the man who was both a Samaritan *and* a leper. There is nowhere, the story proclaims, that Jesus *cannot or will not* enter in.

And yet, the physical healing in the story today is almost a sideline event.

It's what happens after that which is the focus –

to this man, who comes back to say thank you, Jesus says...

Your faith has made you well

A deeper wellness, in addition to the physical healing.

Thanksgiving really is an act of faith. Faith that helps us to recognise God in the joys we find, and faith that even in the darkness we can give thanks, knowing there is nowhere outside his ability to give, to restore, to bless, to uplift.

Thanksgiving is a **realisation of gift**, of presence, that moves this man not just to rejoice, but to seek the object of his thankfulness, and to share it. I wonder why it was *this man* – *the double* outcast who was the man who was thankful. Was it, perhaps, that he knew more about being vulnerable than the other nine?

When we are vulnerable, we are open to grace. And when we receive grace and open our hearts to its source.... we become people of blessing too – little refractions of his life-giving light in the world.

When my brother was really unwell for a long period, I got into the habit of sending him photos throughout the day. Anything that would make him smile. Over the days, no matter what was going on in my life, I was constantly looking for beauty, joy and hope to share.

And somehow, in that sharing I became someone who was much more aware of goodness and blessing. I became more aware of, and more able to share with others, a hope and possibility - the beauty and poetry I discovered written into the world. Reflecting on this, I realise it is something I really must re-discover, and nourish, and I really do encourage you to, also.

Perhaps, together, we can remember that ancient Christian practise of giving thanks for three things at the end of the day, or perhaps during the day as it unfolds – clothing ourselves in thankfulness – making a habit of saying *thank you, thank you, thank you...*

Let us become people of thanksgiving. Let us look, and see, and name the goodness in things. Even in the darkest of times. We shall find God there.

So that even as we may begin every day with *help me, help me, help me....* aware of our needs, our vulnerability

So we may end with *thank you, thank you, thank you*