

HARVEST THANKSGIVING

(Luke 17.11-19)

This is a day when we express our thanks. We've heard just now about a group of animals and their approach. Let me tell you a story about a very special pig which deserved the thanks of the farmer who owned it.

The farmer was showing a man round his farm one day. They came to the pig sty and there was a magnificent pig with a wooden leg. Not surprisingly the visitor asked about the wooden leg.

The farmer replied: *Arr...now that's a very special pig. One night when we were all in bed the farm caught fire. But that pig saw it, broke out of the sty, called the fire brigade, threw buckets of water on the fire, then rushed into the house and rescued me, my wife and the children. Yes; that there's a very special pig! And did he lose his leg trying to fight the fire?* Enquired the visitor.
Oh, no! But a very special pig like that – you don't eat it all at once!

An ungrateful farmer: nine ungrateful former but now healed lepers.

You might have expected them all to come back and say thank you to Jesus – perhaps not to go as far as to fall at his feet, but at least to express their gratitude. But only one did; and he was the one the others, being Jewish, would have despised because he was a Samaritan.

Come with me to heaven.

On arrival we walk into a reception area where we meet our guide for the trip, an angel called Ruth. She leads us down a corridor and opens the first door off the corridor. We find ourselves inside a large workroom filled with angels. Guide Ruth tells us: *This is the receiving section. Here all petitions to God said in prayer are received.*

We gaze round the room. It is frantically busy with an army of angels watching a giant screen apparently linked to some sort of smartphone displaying requests – some of them very long; some just a few words.

On down the corridor to another door: again we are in a large room with even more angels working away even more feverishly than in the first room. *This is called the blessing room; explains Ruth. These angels are busy organising all sorts of blessings which people have not asked for but which God wants them to have.*

Now we move on down the corridor until we reach a third door. Angel Ruth tells us: *This is the packaging and delivery section. Here both the things people have asked for and the blessings God wants to give them are processed and sent off.*

This room is even busier than the first two. There are many, many angels working very hard here packaging the many requests and blessings ready for delivery to earth.

We move on down to the end of the corridor. Ruth opens the last door and we are in a very small room. There is only one angel here and he is sitting doing nothing.

This is the acknowledgement room: says Ruth rather quietly. She seems embarrassed.

How is it that there is no work going on here? We ask.

It's so sad, the angel sighs. *After people receive what they have asked for and the blessings they haven't asked for but still get, very few send back acknowledgments.*

So, we ask, how do we acknowledge God's answers to prayers and his free blessings?

Simple, replies Ruth, *Just say 'thank you, Lord'*

We are puzzled: *We can understand saying 'thank you' for answers to prayer. But what about the blessings?*

Ruth takes a deep breath:

If you have food in the fridge, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep you are richer than 75% of the world.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than many who will not survive today.

If you have never experienced the fear in war, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 700 million in the world.

She pauses and begins again;

If you can attend a church without the fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death you are envied by, and more blessed than, 3 billion people in the world.

If you can hold your head up and smile, you are not the norm. You are unique to all those in doubt and despair.

*If you.....*We hold up our hands. We have got the message!

Well, that was something of a flight of the imagination. But when we are looking at reasons to be grateful to God, it sometimes helps to look at one or two real stories.

Tom Wright, our former bishop, tells of two explorers who were lost in the South American jungle not long ago. For nine months they wandered about, not knowing where they were or how to get out. Finally, after many adventures and after giving up all hope, they were found and rescued. Just imagine their joy and their gratitude to their rescuers, to say nothing of the joy and gratitude on the part of their relatives who, notwithstanding their prayers, had given up hope of ever seeing them again.

Many of you will know John and Mavis Bradbury who live in Vane Court. Some of you will know that their little grandson, Isaac, was diagnosed with a malignant tumour and has been undergoing pretty grim treatment for some time. On September 26th, John and Mavis copied to me an e-mail from their daughter, Caroline.

It read like this: *Isaac was very brave on Friday and endured a canula being put in twice - the first came out! This was for dye to be put in as it shows up tumours better than without. He funnily enough fell asleep inside the machine*

and was fab. The staff were fantastic with him. HIS SCAN WAS PERFECTLY NORMAL.

I and many others had been praying for months about Isaac, asking God for healing. And here he was – fully healed!

I will bet that, over the last couple of months as you travelled about:

- That at 10 or 11 o'clock at night you will have seen powerful lights in fields as farmers worked late to finish their combining.
- That those same farmers then started ploughing and harrowing ready for the next crop.
- That your car or bus has been held up by a slow-moving tractor pulling a trailer piled high with grain.

Later we have an old hymn with some new words which bring those modern methods into focus.

I confess that seeing those aspects of farming around harvest time, I did not think to send an arrow prayer to God to say thank you for those hard-working farmers. Not only that, I moaned about being held up by the tractors and trailers crawling along at 20 mph – nine leper behaviour or what?

As we saw right at the start of this service, farmers from all over the world - we noted at least a dozen countries - are working for our benefit.

Our ten lepers had had a miraculous healing from a dreadful disease which then had no known cure. So why did nine of them not go back to Jesus to thank him? Was it because they were keen to get back to their families from whom they had necessarily been separated since the onset of their disease? Was it because Jesus was something of a 'marked man' by the Jewish authorities and they did not want to be further associated with him? Was it that they intended to go back and thank him but (like sometimes happens to us) other things got in the way? We simply don't know.

What we do know, if we have any Christian faith at all, is that our God is the giver of all things: every mouthful of food we take, every breath of air we inhale, every note of music we hear, every smile of the face of a friend, a child,

a spouse – all that, and a million things more, are good gifts from his generosity.

In his letter to the Christians at Ephesus, St. Paul urges them (and of course us) to: *Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.*

Let's do just that!