

FRANKLIN CONGREGATIONAL-CHRISTIAN CHURCH, UUC  
THANKSGIVING MESSAGE  
Sunday, November 19, 2023

I want to talk about Turkeys for a few minutes – turkeys are central to our Thanksgiving celebrations. When I was young, all the extended family gathered together – there was a huge turkey which my dad carved up, there was gravy for the mashed potatoes and stuffing, unmentionable vegetables, and homemade pies... it was a feast. I hope you also have fond memories.

I read an article recently about turkeys. According to author Fred McGuiness, the domesticated turkey is “as brainless as a baseball,” and he describes how turkeys can have trouble doing even the simplest things.

Take eating for example – turkeys have been known to starve to death right next to a mountain of food. Other times they will eat so much so quickly that grain will fill their gullets and they choke to death. Drinking water can also be a problem for turkeys – farmers have found them drowned in shallow troughs. If a turkey is outside looking up to the sky with its mouth open, when it starts to rain they can die. They’re often not smart enough to close their mouths so they drown standing up.

At least turkeys have an excuse for being ‘bird-brained’ – there’s not much up there. However, there’s less excuse for us humans. In today’s gospel lesson, Luke writes about 10 lepers. That group included some pretty big turkeys. Jesus had given them a huge gift – he healed them from a disgusting, nasty, painful, unsightly skin disease. More importantly, he made it possible for them to re-enter society and be reunited with their families. 10 lepers were healed, but only 1 leper, a Samaritan at that, came back and said, “Thank you.”

Few things recounted in the gospels actually surprised Jesus. Most of the time he seems to know what's going to happen before it occurs. But in this case, Jesus registers surprise – “were there not 10 healed?” he asks incredulously. “Where are the other nine?” Jesus was astonished by their ingratitude. 10 received God's blessing, but only 1 stopped to give thanks.

None of us wants to be a turkey – and to avoid being one means following the 1. What was it about this one man that set him apart?

1<sup>st</sup>: in verse 15, that when the man saw he was healed, he returned and gave thanks. So a first step in thanks-giving is perceiving, seeing the ways we've been blessed.

God has given the creatures various ways of seeing – I've heard a hawk, perched on top of the Empire State Building, could locate a dime on the sidewalk below. I don't know why a hawk would care about a dime located on the sidewalk, but if it were there, the hawk could spot it. The hawk's vision is 8 times more acute than ours.

A bee has a different kind of vision – its eyes have 15,000 facets that enable it to see the sun as a single dot and to navigate long distances with the sun as a reference.

A kingfisher has 2 kinds of vision, one for spotting fish as it flies overhead and another for seeing the fish underwater.

There are different ways of seeing and we may need to see things in different ways if we are to experience the full measure of our blessings. Some blessings are easy to see like our full refrigerators. Some of us have been healed of challenging illnesses. There may be other dramatic good things that have happened. All of us here this morning are profoundly lucky to be living here in America and not in a troubled location. We're all blessed too that we have more than adequate food

– sometimes even too much. We are blessed to live in warm homes and don't have to sleep in a shelter or on a heating grate or a city street. Many of our blessings are completely obvious.

Maybe other blessings require another type of 'seeing' because they're more subtle. Can we thank God this Thanksgiving for the good things but also for the difficult situations that didn't happen – things we might have worried about which never occurred.

Can we look another way still, and find blessings in the problems we do face? Scottish preacher George Matheson once put it, "I've thanked God a thousand times for my 'roses,' now I've got to learn to thank God for the thorns. George Matheson happened to be blind – a significant thorn.

In the end, Matheson was able to see with his spiritual eye some hidden blessings in his blindness. He found lack of sight made him a better listener; he became more patient with others; more willing to receive the help and care of others; to be more sensitive to other's sufferings.

A first step in the 10<sup>th</sup> leper's journey to thanks-giving was seeing.

2ndly, we learn that this leper went beyond seeing to saying – Luke says, "When he saw that he was healed, he turned back, praising God with a loud voice." The leper's thanks-giving began with perception then moved to proclamation.

An old proverb goes, "the thankful person tastes his joy twice." One tastes it when it happens and tastes it again in speaking about it. If we see a beautiful work of art that touches us, part of the joy and wonder of that experience is expressing our gratitude for the gifts of the artist.

We're not meant to keep gratitude and appreciation bottled up. Thanking God aloud is the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson we learn from the leper.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> lesson isn't from scripture, rather from tradition. Tradition has it this 10<sup>th</sup> leper was the one who spread the news of Jesus throughout Samaria. Tradition has it, this healed leper paid particular attention to telling other lepers how Jesus made him whole.

Thanks is half of the word Thanksgiving. Giving is the other half of the word. The late President Hoover said, "Give for the joy of giving and sing hymns of thankfulness that you have something to give."

Both the words think and thank come from the same root. 9 of the 10 forgot to think and thank God for their blessings. The 10<sup>th</sup> leper saw his blessings, said thanks for his blessings, and shared his blessings. So can we. Amen.