

Wednesday in Trinity 14 Week, Year C

Luke 17

There's a famous story about a man who wrote a book and called it: *Humility and How I Achieved It*. The title is almost as self-contradictory as the phrase 'the good Samaritan' would have been. Humility is a real paradox, that unlike other virtues, those who really possess it usually are the last to have any idea that they are humble.

The various short sayings at the start of the chapter all have humility as their common thread and they all point towards the humility that we should either learn or keep on doing. Jesus says this basically: don't get puffed up, forgive those who say sorry. His approach is like this: when you forgive someone, you're making yourself their servant, not their master.

Forgiving someone again and again ought not to get harder and harder it shouldn't be a matter of restraining anger for a longer and longer time, like someone holding their breath underwater for longer and longer periods of time. If that's what it's like, we've missed the point. We're not scoring moral points or taking the high ground. We're to be humble, taking no advantage of the situation, to give to other person generous and welcoming forgiveness *just as* God has given to us. After all, that's the real source of humility: our place before God.

You might think this will take more faith. To this Jesus responds quickly. It's not great faith we need; it is faith in a great God. Faith is like a window through which you can see something. What matters is not whether the window is six centimetres or six metres high; what matters is the God that our faith is looking out on. If it's the creator God, the God active in Jesus and the Holy Spirit, then the tiniest peep-hole of a window will give us access to power like we've never dreamed of. Of course, it's not power to be used at our whim; as soon as we tried that God would remind us who he really is; humility once again.

The final shocking lesson in humility is that we can never put God into debt. Our service in his name is done only in gratitude.

But is this gratitude a kind of grudging, dutiful one or is it one of joy? What would make you shout for joy? You might shout for joy when the doctor told you that someone you loved very dearly had come safely through the operation, and was going to be all right after all. You might do it when suddenly all your debts were rolled away and you were given a new start in life.

So in the middle of today's passage what's more surprising: that one came back, shouted with joy and fell at Jesus' feet? Or the fact that nine didn't?

The other nine were probably eager to rush back to their families that they didn't go back and look for Jesus. The Samaritan – the despised foreigner – however puts them to shame by expressly thanking Jesus. It doesn't mean that the others are any less healed, but they're certainly less grateful. After the lesson in humility comes the lesson in gratitude. Humility is still built in though only the outsider, the foreigner, gives God the glory, showing up the Jews whose very name reminded them to praise God (the name 'Judah' in Hebrew means praise).

Jesus has the same lesson for us. God is the giver of all things: food, air, music – a million things and more, all are good gifts from his generosity. Saying grace before meals, thanking God for joyous moments, actually counting blessings before God; all of these are ways to cultivate that sense of humble gratitude. It's a healthy thing to do, especially in our country where so much is simply assumed to be an absolute right: health, home, happiness and every possible future comfort.

New life came for the Samaritan. He was dead, but is now alive again. The life that we've all longed for has already come. The God of life and death is at work through Jesus. This isn't a vague general truth. It held good for the ten lepers. It holds good for us now. This is the God who we have faith in. This is the God who we are grateful too. The rhythm of faith and gratitude simply what being a Christian is all about.