

**November 18, 2018**  
**Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Celebration Sunday**  
**Dedication of Participation Cards**  
**Veterans Day**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
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## **THANK YOU NOTES**

Deuteronomy 10:12-16

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer.

Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'

Prayer for illumination

Holy God, Word made flesh, silence our agendas; banish our assumptions; cast out our casual detachments, Confound our expectations; confront us where we need to be confronted, clear the cobwebs from our ears; penetrate the corners of our hearts with this word, gather our hearts in gratitude.

## INTRODUCTION

At the Presbytery meeting yesterday in Geneseo, I found a bulletin board that is entirely dedicated to Thank you notes. The implication is that they are not only written, but also received. Jimmy Fallon has a segment on the Tonight Show called Thank You notes. In it he is both ribbing and breathing life into a custom many felt was headed into extinction. Here are some of my favorites.

- “Thank you, cotton candy,” ... “for making my grandmother’s hair look delicious.”
- Thank you, “bowling, for giving me an excuse to drink with somebody else’s shoes on.”
- “Thank you, leaf piles, or as Adam and Eve call you – laundry”
- Thank you “cows for not being called the milk horses”
- Thank you “pumpkin carving for assuming after being ripped open, disemboweled and stabbed, the pumpkin would be smiling.”
- Thank you hand towel sensor machines. You never work. So I just end up looking like I’m waving hello to a wall robot
- Thank you Christmas tree farm You’re pretty much the only place in the world where a man carrying an axe in one arm and a toddler in the other can be considered normal.
- Thank you, graduation gowns, for basically saying, “This is one of the most important days of your life, so dress in your finest clothing then throw this loose fitting garbage sack over the top of it.” ... and wear this square hat too ...
- Thank you, the phrase “the greatest thing since sliced bread,” for making me seriously question who’s in charge of deciding what the “greatest thing” is.
- Thank you, the term “outstanding debt”, for making it sound awesome to owe people money.
- Thank you back to school season for being the magical time when parents look at school teachers and say ‘They’re your problem now.’”
- Thank you Hi jump – or as I like to call you – opposite limbo
- Thank you people who sleep walk ... for literally following your dreams
- Thank you, hard taco shells, for surviving the long journey from factory, to supermarket, to my plate and then breaking the moment I put something inside you.
- “Thank you, revolving doors, for making angry exits impossible”
- Thank you, People Who Ask If I’m Pregnant, even though my youngest child is in third grade. You keep me dialed into scriptures on taming my tongue. Thanks for helping me grow in the Word.
- Thank you, Croissants, for letting me know how annoying someone is based on how they pronounce you.
- Thank you, Exercise, for being the only thing stopping me from getting in shape.
- Thank you, apostrophes, for being pretty cool, even though sometimes you can be a bit possessive.

· "Thank you, lobsters for always looking like you're putting things in quotes."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Fallon's routine is a hoot, of course, a joke that points up the truth that the boring stuff your parents made you do never actually goes out of fashion and that also inadvertently supports recent scientific findings linking gratitude to increased optimism, stress reduction and a better night's sleep.

There is WebMDHealth, article entitled "Boost Your Health with a Dose of Gratitude." It cites thousands of years of philosophic and religious teaching urging gratitude and then cited new evidence that "grateful people—people for whom gratitude is a permanent trait—have a health edge on not-so-grateful people." It cites evidence, that grateful people are generally more optimistic and hopeful; take better care of themselves, and have stronger immune systems.

Apparently, what Emily Post termed good manners (science prefers "gratitude intervention") has all kinds of unexpected benefits. So your Mom was right when she made you call your grandmother and thank her for the birthday card and insisted that you sit down and write thank-you notes. The participation cards you have been invited to return are, in-essence, Thank You notes to God.

What does all this have to do with the text? Everything. Today's text has a tone of "gratitude intervention" woven into it. In this story, while Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, 10 lepers from a nearby leper colony call out in unison to him. Obeying the ritual laws of their day, they keep their distance from him, but they still call out, begging for healing. Jesus sees their pain and suffering and sends them to the priests. Immediately, all 10 of them are healed. But only one of them goes back to find Jesus. When he sees him, he falls at his feet, praises and glorifies Jesus for his healing. Realizing that his life has been forever altered, this man returns in gratitude to Jesus, worshiping him in response.

But here's the twist of the narrative—this man is a foreigner, a Samaritan, an outcast. Jews and Samaritans had a history of conflict and division. Although this man had been living together in a leper colony with Jews, their healing would have socially divided them yet again. In the midst of this division, the outsider is the only one who returns to glorify and praise Jesus, a Jew. This Samaritan, praises Jesus for welcoming him back into society, fully restored and healthy. Jesus questions what happened to the other nine, but nothing can take away the thanksgiving and praise of this Samaritan. As Jesus tells him, "Your faith has saved you."

The Protestant reformer "Martin Luther was once asked to describe the nature of true worship. His [reply was]: the tenth leper turning back." In other words, this man didn't act as if he deserved this healing. Instead, in humility, he recognized that something this miraculous and wonderful could only come from God.

Last Sunday we spent some time talking about giving thanks in all circumstances. I resonate with the Presbyterian novelist, Anne Lamott, in her book on prayer titled *Help, Thanks, Wow*. In it she talks through three types of prayer that we often find ourselves praying. In her chapter on "Thanks" she says that most of us offer <sup>2</sup> prayers of thanks only when we've dodged a bullet, or when the tests come back negative, or the brakes worked right when you needed them to. But living a life of thanksgiving is much different. She says, "If we are lucky, gratitude [can] become a habit."<sup>3</sup> She argues that living a life of gratitude leads us to be aware of the abundance around us; it leads us to acts of greater compassion for others. It generates joyful generosity. Gratitude therefore isn't a simple prayer that we offer when things happen to go well. It's a lifestyle that leads us past our own self-absorbed lives into

truer faithfulness. But what's so great about Anne Lamott is that she admits how hard this is. With so much negativity surrounding us it's hard not to get weary from the weight of it all. But this is exactly when we need the story of the tenth leper. As Martin Luther said, the nature of true worship is the tenth leper turning back. In good times or bad, the nature of our worship, the call of our lives, is to fall down in thankfulness for the blessings we've received.

With that, Let us worship God.

#### Closing Prayer

Lord God, Help us we pray to recognize the difference between satisfaction and smugness, being content and being comfortable. May our expressions of gratitude never deafen us to the cries of those in need; and in celebrating your love may we never forget that your love reaches others.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/jimmy\\_fallon.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/jimmy_fallon.html)

<sup>2</sup> Taken From a Commentary on this passage from David Lose, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org). October 10, 2010.

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=783](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=783)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.