

St James United Church



Message for October 12, 2025 Thanksgiving Sunday

“Grateful Because We Are Graced” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Philippians 4:4-9; and Luke 17:11-19

As we come together today, I'd like to reflect on two aspects of this holiday weekend - gratitude and relationships. We tend to highlight gratitude, not surprising given that the holiday is called thanksgiving. But if we are honest, the draw more than turkey and pumpkin pie, as good as these are, is gathering with family and friends, strengthening the ties between us. And that's what we're doing in our worship, as two congregations join in one celebration, praying together as siblings in our shared Methodist heritage, Christian faith, and most importantly, as fellow humans. I'm grateful that we're worshipping together as we share these multiple layers of relationship.

Relationships are core to our readings this morning too, even with gratitude as the more obvious theme. This is especially the case in Luke 17, both the presence of relationships, and in the start of the portion we heard, their absence. You see, a requirement for people with a skin disease in the time of Jesus was to live apart from the community. They were in relationship with others like them, of course, but how could that replace what was shared with parents, spouses, children, friends? At best you spoke with them from a distance, like what happens in the story. No wonder they approached Jesus, asking for mercy. They even called him by his name and referred to him as master, suggesting a desire to be in relationship with him and not just their loved ones. So, he shows them mercy, telling them to show themselves to the priests whose declaration of health was needed to restore them to their community, regain the relationships they lost.

Deuteronomy 26, though about making a thanksgiving offering, is about multiple relationships. First there's one between the offerer of the gift and the priest. Then there's one with the offerer's ancestors as he recounts his history. This is something we can appreciate, folks from here quick to ask someone where they're from. Locating someone is about knowing who their ancestors are, and how they are connected to ours. It's about our shared story. We name who we are by naming where we come from, and with that the traditions, skills, wisdom that make us, us. And it is also about the connection of ancestors to the land, highlighting that relationship's importance. The land isn't something we live on but are part of, literally if we eat food grown in it, joining us to the plants and animals that share it as well as our ancestors buried there, everything connected.

There is another important relationship named in this reading and that is the foreigner living in the land with them. We don't hear it in the section we read but just beyond it the offerer is told to share his gift with the foreigner as well as the widow and orphan. Everyone in the territory is to be cared for, considered as members of the same family, one community. Why? Because they're all children of one heavenly father, the same divine parent. That divine parent rescued the

people of Israel from enslavement not because they were special but because they were in need, and they were to do the same in the land they were rescued to, everyone viewed as a sibling. That is what draws us together in today's service, siblings in faith but more importantly just siblings, relatives.

That sentiment brings us back to our Luke reading as the Samaritan, the foreigner, who was healed, returns to thank Jesus for restoring him to his community, enabling him to go back to his relatives. Jesus wonders aloud why only one returns but asks this without judging those who did as he had instructed them. Their excitement was understandable. Their healing meant they got to go home. But the Samaritan understood it at a deeper level, knew as Paul wrote that he needed to rejoice in God because the relationships he got back weren't possible without a connection to their source, to God working through Jesus. He had been touched by grace, mercy shown him, which changed everything. As Jesus said, his faith made him well. This isn't referring to an assent of his mind but a change of his heart. He came back in gratitude because he wasn't just healed; he'd been made whole. As he rejoiced in his imminent homecoming, I'm sure he saw other connections, not just with his family, but the nine with whom he shared a life, the people he came from, the people they came from too, the land they all shared, with Jesus, his disciples, and ultimately with God. Like him, we are all shown mercy, given grace, and not because we are special but simply because we're in need of it.

This reminds me how gratitude and grace go together. Gratitude is less an action than it is a way of seeing the world. As Diana Butler-Bass affirms in her book about gratitude, it is being aware that all around us are gifts. No matter the kind of day we are having, there are moments we are helped, feel strong, nourished, be it with food, friends, or a beautiful sunset. These are all gifts of love, gifts that remind us we aren't alone but connected, related, even when we're not aware of it, and ultimately to God who loves us through them. That's why we celebrate our gratitude this weekend with others. We know gratitude and relationships go together. Gratitude is something we can nurture, taking time each day and not just once a year to ponder our gifts, our blessings. As we pause, our awareness not only of these gifts grows but so does our awareness of all the relationships these gifts are part of.

Which leads us to one final point, namely that our gratitude obligates us to each other. Gratitude is connected to humility, to the awareness that none of us are self-made but need each other. We symbolize this each Thanksgiving too, ideally sharing our bounty with people who otherwise do not have a feast to go to. And how can it be otherwise? The land we share certainly provides for everyone, without judgement, so why wouldn't we do the same, and not just this weekend but always, sharing with one another?

Friends, Thanksgiving is about gratitude. We pause to give thanks for the gifts of our lives. And as we pause, we see how connected we are to others, deepening our relationships, with family and friends, and then in ever wider circles, connecting us to God. What a gift! Gratitude is about grace, about knowing who and whose we are. So let us be grateful. Grateful because we are graced. Thanks be to God. Amen.