

**12 OCTOBER 2025    A Reflection    Rev Wayne Toleafoa**

## **BEING THANKFUL**

**Readings:** Jeremiah 29: 1, 4 -7; 2 Timothy 2: 8 -15; Luke:17: 11-19

The common theme across our three readings today is faithful endurance and active gratitude in the midst of life's challenges.

This morning I'm going to go briefly over the first two readings but concentrate on the gospel reading which is our guiding lesson today – a reading about gratitude.

Each passage calls believers to remain steadfast, to seek the good of others, and to trust in God's presence and promises—even when circumstances are difficult.

### **Jeremiah 29:1, 4–7 — is about Faithful Living in Exile**

**In our first reading** Jeremiah writes to the exiles in Babylon, urging them not to resist or despair, but to *settle in*, build homes, plant gardens, and *seek the welfare of the city*.

Look at the positives of living in exile. Make a decent life for themselves and their offspring. Don't concentrate on the negatives. God is with you.

This is a radical call to *hopeful engagement* even in a foreign land, trusting that God is still at work even in their displacement.

The exiles are reminded that *God's plan includes their current situation*, and they are to live faithfully within it.

### **2 Timothy 2:8–15 — is about Endurance in Ministry**

**In our second reading**, Paul encourages Timothy to *remember Jesus Christ*, risen from the dead, the foundation of the Christian faith.

Paul himself was imprisoned when he wrote to Timothy, but he continued to preach even to the guards and tells Timothy: "The word of God is not chained."

The passage emphasizes *perseverance, faithfulness, and trust in God's promises*, even when suffering.

Timothy, as a young Church leader, is urged to present himself as one "approved," rightly handling the word of truth – being careful in the way that he preaches and teaches.

## **Luke 17:11–19 Gratitude & Faith**

**As I've said, today I'm going to concentrate on the gospel reading from Luke 17:11–19 because I believe that Gratitude is such an important part of the Christian life. It can shape the way that we experience life and make us happier and better people.**

The gospel story is a familiar story to most of us who've been brought up in churches.

Jesus heals ten men who are isolated from the community because of their skin diseases. The Bible calls them lepers. When they see Jesus passing by, they call out for help:

*<sup>13</sup>they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" <sup>14</sup>When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean.*

Jesus instructs, then on the way, they realize that they are healed as they go. But only one—a Samaritan—returns to give thanks.

The story highlights the human failing of taking the good things in life for granted, especially when they have come to us freely and without any effort on our part.

We fail to be grateful and recognize the grace in our lives. We can also be terribly ungrateful for the good things and the gifts that have come our way.

Jesus affirms that the man's faith has made him well. But he alone – of the 10 is made whole, because he is full of gratitude for the gift of his healing.

**As I reflected on this story, the thought came to me that there are really only two prayers we need to pray in our lifetimes.**

One is, 'Help!' And the other is, 'Thank you'.

**Our first prayer, the 'Help Prayer' covers a lot of territory.**

We might be praying for help for ourselves or praying for help for others (in the prayers called intercessions), e.g. praying for Israel & Gaza; praying for help for a friend in hospital, praying for help for family members who live far away. Or we could be praying for specific things that we are hoping for.

**In all those prayers we are praying for some kind of help.**

When I wake up in the morning, getting ready for the new day, my mind is in that limbo between waking and sleeping. Some people would call it a liminal space – and I find that until I pray and commit the day to God, I'm in that limbo.

My prayer helps me focus on the day, and focus on other people, my family and friends the parish. And it helps me focus on God.

**The second type of prayer is the Thank You prayer or a Prayer of Gratitude.**

**It is a prayer that doesn't even need words. It is an attitude towards God, towards others and towards life. An attitude of gratitude. It can be learned. But it is also (I believe) a spiritual gift. Like a fruit of the Holy Spirit.**

**Some mornings** I'm thankful that I've even woken up. I'm getting older, and as the old Army saying goes, 'Every day above ground is a good day.'

I'm grateful that God/life has breathed new life into me for another day.

I expect to be around for quite a long time yet, but I know that my life will one day end, like every other life. So, I am grateful for every day. And I believe it makes me a happier and healthier person.

**The Lord's Prayer, which we pray so often**, is the model of all Christian Prayer. It is a combination of the 'Help' prayer and the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the two types of prayer that I mentioned earlier.

I know that's oversimplifying the many types of Christian prayer, but I find simplifying is better than over complicating.

As we pray the Lord's Prayer later in our service, I invite you to think of which sentences are the 'Help' type prayers and which are the 'Thank you' prayers.

**Unsurprisingly, there are schools of Psychology which actually talk/write about the positive benefits of gratitude.**

The most well-known Psychologist of Gratitude is Robert Emmons who taught at the University of California through the 90s and into the 2000s. Emmons wrote numerous books and articles on gratitude. He is now retired, but he continues to do lead research and to lecture on the Psychology of Gratitude.

Professor Martin Seligman is another well-known psychologist who has done a huge amount of research around gratitude and Positive Psychology. Seligman is teaching at University of Pennsylvania.

Other Psychologists in the field of Gratitude include Joel Wong, Joshua Brown, and Tyler VanderWeele.

Their research shows that gratitude can enhance mental, emotional wellbeing, and even physical wellbeing.

Documented Health Benefits of Gratitude by these psychologists include

- Improved sleep quality and reduced insomnia
- Lower risk of depression and anxiety
- Better cardiovascular health and reduced inflammation
- Enhanced empathy and reduced aggression
- Greater resilience and emotional control
- Lower mortality rates among older adults.

There are lots of other benefits of being Grateful. For example, it improves the quality of family dynamics and personal relationships.

Various therapies have been developed around their research, including journalling, mindfulness, counting your blessings (putting a note in a jar every time you recall something good in your life), acknowledging goodness in your life and goodness in others. These are just some ways of wiring the brain to be grateful and therefore happier.

Science is on the side of gratitude.

Gratitude is also nothing new to our Judaeo Christian Faith. Gratitude should come naturally to us if we are reading the Bible regularly. It is the bread and butter of Christian Spirituality.

Every Sunday, and I hope every day, we pray our prayers of Thanksgiving.

There are approximately 30 psalms of thanksgiving and at least 18 psalms of praise in the Book of Psalms. Some overlap, so the total number of psalms focused on praise and thanksgiving is around 40–50. One third of the Book of Psalms.

One verse in Psalm 136: verse 1, summarises all the Psalms of Thanksgiving:

“O Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

You and I are the subjects of that love and that goodness.

*<sup>15</sup>Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. <sup>16</sup>He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup>Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? <sup>19</sup>Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”*

## PRAYER

God of mercy,  
you spoke healing into ten lives—  
but found praise in the voice of one outsider.

May we, like the Samaritan,  
recognize your presence in unexpected places,  
and return to you with hearts full of gratitude.  
Through Jesus Christ, who restores and renews,  
**Amen.**