

. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (Jeremiah 29:7)

¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ ¹⁹ Then he said to him, ‘Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.’ (Luke 17:18-19)

If you’ve never been an exile – a refugee – an immigrant – then the most important parts of today’s scripture won’t make much sense to you. The words from Jeremiah urging the exiles to ‘seek the welfare (peace and prosperity – NIV) of the city...’ seems like too much to ask. Working with ‘the enemy’ (for the exiles were still on the losing side of what had been generations of conflict in the region) is not usually thought of as a good idea. But the Scriptures are full of ideas that strike us as strange – full of moments that are meant to break the cycles of human misery with acts of faith, generosity, and compassion.

If you are a refugee – an immigrant – an exile; you understand that. The most common expression I hear from folks who are new to Canada is gratitude – closely followed by a desire to ‘do well.’ They have seen what happens when selfishness rules the day: Countries are destroyed – lives are destroyed – nothing good comes from that. Gratitude is the key to their new life – and it is a transforming thing.

I think that is why, when the Samaritan - one of many who had been healed - breaks into songs of praise; when this person praises God and falls on his face before Jesus, grateful to be healed, Jesus praises his FAITH. A Samaritan...with faith...it’s a transforming thing.

And the identity of this grateful ‘former leper’ is important. The ‘people of God’ don’t have a monopoly on faith – the exiles (in Jeremiah) are called to set aside their prejudice and get involved – be eager participants in the success of the city (a city that wasn’t ‘home’ to them). Faith has nothing to do with nationality, or location, or even a particular expression of religious belief. Faith and gratitude are deeply connected.

Gratitude is that recognition that you have found something (or been given something) that you may have desperately wanted, but- for one reason or another -was beyond your reach. Gratitude is expressed when good things come your way – expected or unexpected. Gratitude requires that you recognize some influence beyond yourself. Gratitude, like faith, can be transformative.

Now – we know how to ‘give thanks.’ The words form easily on our lips – automatically – when someone holds a door, or offers a gift. But the state of mind that can move us to ‘seek the welfare of the city...’ or to fall face down in praise and wonder – that does not come naturally to us. So, to consider how we might ‘step up our game’ – to think more deeply about how gratitude might change us – how grateful faith might be the best expression of our desire to follow Jesus – I want you to try something.

I have a list of things that a small group – meeting earlier this week – identified as the assets of our congregation. The list is random, and some things are repeated, but I’d like you to hear these things and think on them. Think of how any of them may have had an impact on your life. Think about the people behind the events, or the history behind them – give a prayer or word of thanks if you feel moved – but then think about how these things might change your life, or someone else’s

life, or this neighbourhood – or this city. These things might move you to gratitude. The next question is always – how do you live into that?

[read list – give time for thought]

Endowments	Weekly givings	Piano	Pipe organ	Kitchen	Gym	Meeting rooms	Location (downtown)	Building
Choir	Congregation	Minister	Volunteers	Variety of skill sets	Women of the church	Welcoming & hospitable	Events	
Acceptance (open door policy)	Variety of rooms for multiple uses	Pipe organ	Beautiful window	Sanctuary	Location	Kitchen	Great pies (and soups)	Heritage
Strong musicians	Caring people	Generous	Compassion (prayer shawls eg)	Willingness of congregation	Friendly congregation	Volunteers	Strong leaders	Community involvement
Connection with college	TarTones	Building	Workable (well-stocked) kitchen	Rentable space	Devoted people	Welcoming	Kid people in congregation	Great minister
Generous	Music	Financial resources	Good reputation (in the community)	Good community connections	Connection with Saamis immigration	Connection with MH family Services	People with experience	Gym
Project Connect	Midnight madness	Pies	Connection with Mustard Seed					

We may feel like strangers in a strange land some days. Our faith makes us different - the way we express our faith (when compared to others) makes us different. Whether we are trying to come to terms with the (so-called) 'faithless,' or the radically faithful, it can seem like a struggle to follow in Jesus' footsteps. But we know what brings life and joy. We know what we have to offer. We know that all of this is a gift of God – and not our own doing – so gratitude seems like a good way to go. Seeking the welfare of the city / the nation / the planet seems like a good way to go. After all, it was good enough for Jesus.