

Squamish United Church
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Adapted sermon by Rev. Trisha Elliot

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Scripture Luke 10:25-37

LET THANKSGIVING FLOW

What are you thankful for?

My list is likely as long as yours and I have a hunch we would put many of the same things on it: a trusted friend, a decent bed, a sunrise, terrific music, a warm, gooey, freshly baked chocolate chip cookie!...okay, maybe you'd prefer ice cream or something to a chocolate chip cookie (everyone's allowed to be wrong!...)

Anyway, I could go on and on, especially in the gratitude for food department.

But thanksgiving isn't enough. Let me show you what I mean.

(Hold up an empty glass in one hand and a pitcher of water in another. Hold the cup of water over the baptism font or a large bowl sitting on a table.)

Let's say that every drop of water I pour into this glass represents something you are thankful for. As I pour, I invite you to pour out your thanksgiving in the sacred silence.

Let your prayers of thanksgiving flow to God.

Let's take a moment of quiet so that we can be focused as we pray.

(Pause then begin to pour from the pitcher slowly, filling the glass.)

We have filled the glass with thanksgiving.

But the truth is that there is no end to God's abundance.

No end to God's blessing. Just look around... We are deeply and richly blessed. We are filled with blessing. (Lift up the cup to show that it is full.)

The question is: How do we let that sense of the abundant blessing overflow?

(Keep pouring so that the water overflows into the font/bowl.)

How do we let thanksgiving spill out of us so that we live out God's abundant Spirit?

It's one thing to be thankful. It's another to live in the spirit of thanksgiving.

I'm sure that the Priest in Jesus' Good Samaritan story who passed by the man beaten on the side of the road could have rhymed off things even in the exact moment when he was crossing over to the other side of the street, that he was grateful for.

So too the Levite.

Maybe both could have filled up a gratitude journal and expressed thanksgiving for their status in life.

If they were asked, they might have said that *they* appreciated a trusted friend, a decent bed, a sunrise, terrific music, a great chocolate chip cookie!

But their thanksgiving didn't go anywhere beyond them. At least not in that moment. It didn't flow into their lives.

It's one thing to be thankful. It's another to live in the spirit of thanksgiving, isn't it?
What made the Samaritan compassionate, I wonder?
What made him bandage a stranger's wounds?
What made him pour out his oil and wine and offer up his own donkey and book him into an inn and pay for it himself?
Jesus doesn't give that part of the story away.
He just says "Go and do likewise."
He says "Be that kind of neighbour."
(Pick up the glass and pour more water into it so that it spills over the edge.)

"Let the love I pour into you pour out of you," is what he's saying in a nutshell.
At Squamish United we hear talk about God's overflowing love all the time – about how God's love could even be called extravagant, or even wasteful.
God flings around and pours out love like God's made of the stuff!
The question that catalyzed Jesus' story was a pretty simple but shrewd one from a legal expert: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"
By now you likely know that from my perspective eternal life is about the here and now - it's not something that happens after you die but actually means that special kind of transformed, Spirit-filled-to-overflowing life that we can have starting anytime!
I'd actually say that the so-called legal expert in our passage asked a strange question – because eternal life isn't something you inherit, and it certainly isn't something you earn – it's more a reflection of your relationship with God – and the kind of life actions that flow out of (or through) a person in that kind of deep, spiritual relationship with the Divine.

So let's dig a little more into Jesus' answer to this question.
Trials and extraordinary circumstances don't build character – they reveal it!
Well, to be fair, if they reveal your faulty character they can still be valuable if you learn and grow from them and then the next time a better character emerges.
We all know this parable well. The Priest and the Levite were supposed to be men of great character – but their actions betrayed them – and you don't really get the sense that they learned anything from the encounter so they come out looking really bad.
You also likely know there's a subtext to featuring a Samaritan as the good guy. To say that the Samaritans and the Jews didn't get along was an understatement. The racial feud had been going on for years. Jews and Samaritans hated one another.

Now, imagine you're the innkeeper that this Samaritan brought the beaten Jew to. Imagine the stories that innkeeper would tell about the Samaritan who went to great lengths for the Jewish victim.
I can imagine the gossip at the inn...
"You'll never believe what just happened. A Samaritan brought the Jew in and told me to look after him. Paid me for it. Gave me two denarii. It's no joke!"
Now, an innkeeper probably sees a lot in their line of work but I bet this rattled his cage, cracked open his world so that more light could get in.

Maybe his life changed like yours and mine does when we are just going about our day and are suddenly astonished by love.

And for sure, the Jewish victim's life changed profoundly the moment the Samaritan knelt in the dust in front of him.

And again the moment that the Samaritan so tenderly wrapped the clean bandages around him.

And again the moment that he poured out his own oil, his own wine, his donkey, and his wallet.

And again, each time he thought about those moments for the rest of his life.

How could that beaten Jewish man not help but be more kind to every Samaritan he came across?

How could he not care in turn?

How could the world not spin a little more gracefully on the axis of that experience?

Now think about this: do you think the Samaritan was trying to accomplish that?

Do you think the Samaritan helped this Jew because he was trying to score points, or impress somebody, or repair the racial divide, or profoundly change and influence lives?

No, of course not!

So why did he help? Because he couldn't *not* help!

He was so filled with God's Presence and love that he was overflowing with gratitude for it, and his gratitude needed an expression, and that expression was to help. Love moved him into love!

And here's the mind-blowing part of this story that we can miss if we're not careful.

Jesus is saying that just because you're a fine, upstanding religious person (like the Priest or the Levite – or maybe even you or me) doesn't mean you necessarily live love.

In fact, it was only the *Samaritan* who was the one living out God's love.

Jesus is literally saying to his followers that even the worst person you can imagine is capable of being so filled to overflowing with God's love – and so teeming with thankfulness for that love – that they can't help but live in that spirit of thanksgiving and love even their worst enemy!

Jesus was asked what one must do to have life eternal?

So he tells this story, and he simply wraps it up with: "Go and do likewise."

The "go and do likewise" part is the key to life.

But that doesn't just mean to rush out and look for troubled people on the street and help them (although, obviously, that's not a bad thing to do).

Go and do likewise means as you go in the world let that holy love you feel filling you up – the love that grows through worship, and learning, and serving, and supporting one another – let that love flow out in whatever ways present themselves in your life.

And that love makes us feel great.

And that great feeling makes us feel grateful.

And that gratitude has to find expression – or, it fades.

Because just like a wonderful deep breath you can't just take it in and hold it for yourself.

God's love only really comes to completeness and fullness by being breathed back out!

It's one thing to be thankful. It's another to live in the spirit of thanksgiving.

Go and do likewise!

This is the beginning of a 3 week series on stewardship and loving our neighbours.

For the next few weeks, we are going to be talking about mission: our personal mission, our congregation's mission, our denomination's mission, and through it all, we are going to contemplate and celebrate God's mission.

God's mission is epitomized in this story. A story about the outpouring of gratitude and love on a dusty, nameless street between Jerusalem and Jericho that could really be anywhere. It could be the street in front of your home, or the street of your workplace, or the street near your hangouts, or the street that runs through the heart of your relationships.

There is "someone on a road" somewhere in your life waiting for your thanksgiving, your gratitude to overflow in love.

(Pick up the pitcher and the glass and start pouring. It should overflow again over the edge.)

Waiting for the abundant, overflowing grace of God.

What are you waiting for? "Go and do likewise," Jesus says.

Let thanksgiving flow!

(Scoop the water out of the font/bowl and let it drip between your fingers.)

This is what we are baptized and called to do.