

# *The Sunnybrook Pulpit*

*Rev. Ross Smillie*

October 7, 2018 – Worldwide Communion Sunday

Thanksgiving Sunday

## **Let Thanksgiving Flow**

“Which of the three was a neighbour to the man who fell among thieves?” – Luke

10:25-37

I want you to imagine that every drop of water in this pitcher is one thing for which we are thankful. If we were to take the time to drop one drop for everything we are grateful for, it would take a fair bit of time, but do you think we could come up with enough gratitudes to fill a glass of water? << I think we could!>>

If I was to start pouring, and we were to think of all the things we are grateful for:

- The food on our plates, the clothes on our backs, the shoes on our feet
- The friends around us, the family we live with and sometimes fight with
- Pumpkin pie and Ice cream
- Smooth roads and safe communities
- City councils and fair judges
- Clean water and flush toilets
- Sun and rain to help things grow
- The moon by night to nourish our imaginations
- Music and poetry and stories
- This community of support, care and inspiration
- Our hearts and lungs and eyes and ears and all the parts of our bodies, some of which we don't even know about!

Keep mumbling the things that you are grateful for – as many things as you can think of, and when you stop, then I will stop pouring. I bet that before we run out of things to be thankful for, that I will not only have filled the glass, but the glass will have overflowed, and the pitcher will be empty. In fact, I bet that before we run out of things to be grateful for, if we kept at it long enough, and were smart enough, we could fill up a bathtub, a lake even! In fact, if we kept at it steadily enough, we could keep the Red Deer River running for a long time. There are that many things for which we could be grateful.

One question, though: what do you think happens to us when we let our gratitude flow?

I think that when our thanksgiving flows, and when it overflows its usual containers, it helps us become more generous and compassionate. You remember the story of the man who fell among thieves? I wonder why the priest and the Levite didn't stop to help? I wonder why they crossed to the other side? I suspect that in part, at that moment, they were stressed out and worried. I suspect that, at that moment, they were not remembering all the reasons they had to be grateful.

And I wonder why the Samaritan did stop and help out, and looked after the man who had been beaten up by robbers. I suspect that, at least in part, he was full of gratitude. Maybe he was grateful for someone who helped him out one time, or that he had extra money in his pocket, or that he had a little oil and wine in his pack to share. Maybe he was grateful that he had a sturdy donkey and didn't have to carry everything himself. Perhaps more than anything else, he was grateful that the robbers were gone, and weren't going to attack him. Perhaps he knew it could just as easily be him; maybe it had been him on occasion, and he was grateful that this time it wasn't. But whatever he was grateful for, his sense of how blessed he was flowed and overflowed, and became compassion and love for his neighbour.

I want to close with a little snippet of a poem called "Kindness," by Naomi Shihab Nye. Nye was travelling in Columbia when she wrote the poem, and part of the poem mentions an experience of seeing someone who had fallen on misfortune, like the unfortunate man in Jesus' story. Before you know kindness, Nye writes, "you must see how this could be you," how the man lying by the side of the road was a person, like you, "with plans and the simple breath that kept him alive."

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,  
You must also know sorrow as the other deepest thing.  
You must wake up with sorrow.  
You must speak to it till your voice  
Catches the thread of all sorrows  
And you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,  
Only kindness that ties your shoes  
And sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,  
Only kindness that raises its head  
From the crowd of the world to say  
It is I you have been looking for,  
And then goes with you everywhere  
Like a shadow or a friend.

You could replace the word “kindness” in that poem, with the word *thanksgiving*: “Before you know thanksgiving as the deepest thing inside, you must also know sorrow as the other deepest thing.” Or you could replace the word sorrow with thanksgiving: “Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside, you must also know thanksgiving as the other deepest thing.” Because without the sense that things could be different, that we could easily be the person who fell among thieves, unless we learn not to take all the blessings in our lives for granted, we will never know either thanksgiving or kindness. And without the overflowing thanksgiving that splashes out kindness, without gratitude, we will never be satisfied, we will never be happy, we will never know joy.

