

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Sept 28, 2014

An Attitude of Gratitude

**Psalm 25:1-9 & Luke 17:15-16
(15, 613, 722, and 457)**

Chances are there are not a lot of us
who will end up prostrate on the ground, face in the dirt,
to express our gratitude,
no matter how deeply we feel it.

It's a bit extreme.
It's over the top.
It's just too much.

Yet that's what this guy does,
this guy who's at the centre of the story
from which our Memorize and Ponder verses came from this morning.
He prostrates himself, flat out, face down,
on the ground at the feet of Jesus.

There are several references
to prostration as a form of devotion or prayer in the Old Testament.
Most of the incidents occur when God is particularly close.
In the New Testament,
Matthew mentions that the wise men fell on their faces in devotion
when they encountered Jesus as a baby.
Matthew also describes Jesus prostrating himself before God
when praying that he might be delivered from his impending death.

So, this form of devotion,
this manner of expressing gratitude for the blessing that flows the heart of God,
strange as it seems to us, or at least me,
is well-known in the Scriptures.
It's a way of expressing deep gratitude for and devotion to
the presence and power of God.

And it involves the whole being of a person –
the mind, the heart, and the gut,
working in harmony to guide the body's behaviour.

That's really what I want to focus on this morning –
how this attitude of gratitude infuses our whole beings
and how that infusion of gratitude is the key to our flourishing.

I bring a couple of key assumptions to my views on attitude and gratitude
that I should make explicit.

First, I think attitude is the most powerful force in human personality.
Your attitude shapes who you are, how you act, what you achieve.

There are two basic attitudes, with countless variations.
One is positive and other is negative.

I remember when I was in Grade 5
and started to do public speaking contests.
In those days, the Optimist club in Niagara Falls sponsored one.
These clubs are still around – 2500 of them world-wide.
There's one in Burnaby that meets over on Still Creek Road.

Their vision reads
“By providing hope and positive vision, Optimists bring out the best in kids.”
So, if you were going to speak in an Optimist speaking contest,
you talked about optimism.
I still remember the little ditty that my Mom and I
worked into my first speech:

*Twixt optimist and pessimist, the difference is droll.
The optimist sees the donut, the pessimist the hole.*

I have no idea how the rest of the speech went.
But I still remember that little snippet of simple poetry
with its profound message –
focus on the positive and that will shape your attitude.

It's a choice only you can make.
Within the Christian tradition, we believe firmly
that you do not make that choice alone.
God has chosen to be with you so you can be a blessing.
God encourages that choice and strengthens you to step into that choice.
With God as your companion, anything is possible.
The journey may not be easy,
but a positive attitude will shape the courage and compassion
with which you travel your way.
It's yours to choose, with Jesus Christ being your helper,
your “strength and shield,” as Psalm 28:7 reminds us.

The second assumption has to do with the way human beings work.
It's about the basic dynamics of being a person.
We use the neurons in our body to do this.
Neurons are electrically excitable cells
"that processes and transmits information
through electrical and chemical signals."
That's how Wikipedia describes them.
They process information that enables us to choose how to live.
That's how I would describe them.

There are three dense clusters of neurons in the human body.
One is in the head, one in around the heart, and one around the gut.
Traditionally, we have called these centres of processing and transmitting
the intellect, the emotions, and the instincts.
Wise and beneficial attitudes emerge when all three centres
are in sync with each other,
when all three centres are providing and processing
their different forms of information
into a single positive attitude that imagines how we can bless the world.

Again, Christians are convinced that this process
is initiated and supported by the work of God's Holy Spirit,
the continuing presence of Jesus Christ in the world
who is working in a particularly focused way in the church
to make the church a positive witness to this energy of God throughout the world.
The electrical excitement that moves our neurons
is the loving energy of God,
seeking to convince all of humanity
that the positive attitudes seen in the faith of Jesus Christ
are the key to a flourishing life in the community of creation.

So much does depend on how you choose to see things.
That's why we talk so much in the Christian tradition about 'redemption,'
literally, 're-deeming,' or re-seeing.'
Christians see things differently.
And because we see things differently, we do things differently.
Our attitude in one of gratitude for God's love.
That attitude flows from God's love for us
and flows into our love for God, others, and ourselves.

And it begins with a prostrating gratitude to God
for his positive reintegrating our lives so we can serve his mission in the world.