

## Sermon for Thank You Sunday

### Mark 6: 1 – 13

Gratitude is the heart of Christian life.

These are not my words: They were spoken by Thomas Merton, a Christian Mystic who wrote in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and who said “Gratitude is therefore the heart of the solitary life, as it is the heart of the Christian life”

Apparently, Merton wrote these words during a time of solitude when, upon reflection, he realised how much God had blessed him.

I suspect that those people in our hearts today, who we want to thank, also had on this special Sunday, things in common with the disciples.

Both had important jobs to do and just like the disciples, they would probably say “we were just doing our job - following instructions”

We however, cannot deny the importance of what they had to do.

Even Jesus experienced rejection rather than gratitude in his ministry:

In our Gospel today, we read that Jesus came to his hometown of Nazareth - a village of between 500 and 2,000 people, small enough that everyone would know everybody else, and their business.

This was not just a boy returning home for a casual visit - having disciples in attendance marked Jesus as a Rabbi.

Mark does not tell us what Jesus taught in that synagogue service.

We are told that he marvelled because of their unbelief.

The townspeople made it clear that they were aware of Jesus’ wisdom and his mighty works, yet they were unwilling to confer extraordinary status on Jesus in spite of his incredible wisdom and works - they did not believe.

Jesus then sends out the twelve, two-by-two.

This strategy is powerful because a partner bestows strength

Ecclesiastes tells us, “For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls, and doesn’t have another to lift him up”

Jesus commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a staff.

No money and only a single tunic.

They were being sent out not really knowing where they were going, or where they would be staying, trusting that God would provide.

It was a little like that at the start of the pandemic, for those we are thanking today.

The virus was an unknown and there was not really a plan on how to care for people.

Like the disciples, many NHS staff did not have the right equipment or PPE. They were without adequate preparation - the virus came out of the blue.

We might say the staff were only doing their job, but they showed such compassion and

resilience working to the point of exhaustion, putting themselves in danger on the front line and putting their families at risk. Some had to be away from their families for long periods.

They had no time for personal comfort, or even sleep. But like the disciples they were working as part of a team and supporting each other.

It was a tough time for families, not being allowed to be with very ill people, or visit those in care homes. It was hard that they could not visit or hug those they loved

Covid-19 is a human catastrophe, but it is also making millions assess what is important and to count their blessings.

This is a pandemic which pays no respect to wealth or status - it infects princes and celebrities alike.

We have all had to share grief and pain and since we have been in this together, it has brought communities together.

That in itself is something to say "Thank You" for.

We can read a story from the bible about a man who had every right to be bitter-but wasn't. The next footsteps in the corridor, he knew, might be those of the guards taking him away to his execution. His only bed was the hard, stone floor of the prison cell. Not an hour passed when he was free from the constant irritation of the chains and the iron manacles. Separated from friends, unjustly accused, brutally treated - if ever a person had a right to complain, it was this man, languishing in a harsh Roman prison.

However, instead of complaints, his lips rang with praise and thanksgiving.

The man was the Apostle Paul, who had learned the meaning of true thanksgiving even in great adversity.

Remarkably, Paul and Silas were expressing thankfulness. They were not praying due to the situation, they were praising God.

Jesus sent out the disciples with little preparation and the minimum of equipment, but they had an important job to do and we have to thank them for being the foundation of our church.

The people who we are thanking today are just the same - they also overcame the most terrible odds.

For Christians, every day is a Thank You day, because in addition to those in our hearts who have helped us through the last 18 months, each day is a day of thanksgiving, if we are "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ".

AMEN

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