

I used to say it long before it became the title of a song in the Broadway show *Wicked*: No good deed goes unpunished. It was an expression of frustration that fit the life experience of being given more work to do when you've done a good job. "Wait a minute? Shouldn't I get a day off for my herculean efforts?"

In management circles, one needs to carefully balance this phenomenon or risk losing productivity. On the other hand, I've seen it applied in cases where you really don't want to be asked to do something again. "We're striving for mediocrity," a former supervisor said. "I don't want to do this again in my tenure."

"Yes Sir!" said the staff, reveling in the snarkiness embedded in our boss's delivery.

Jesus seems a bit snarky himself in today's Gospel. In the few verses prior to what we hear today, Jesus warns his disciples not to be a stumbling block to those who wish to hear the Word. He admonishes them to call each other out when the truth needs to be said. He tells them they need to forgive each other seventy times seven. Life as a Jesus-follower seems to be impossible. It's no wonder the twelve of the inner circle beg him to "Increase our faith!"

Now, there are two ways to interpret Jesus' response. The first isn't so kind.

"Increase it? Twice zero is still zero! You don't even have the faith the size of a mustard seed – and you know how small they are!"

The second is kind, supportive, and affirming:

"You have faith! Even a little bit of faith has the potential of doing impossible things. Just think what you could do if you put your mind to it."

On reflection, our response to those who do things for us isn't usually the 'pull up a chair and have dinner with me' example Jesus gives. Too often, it's 'well that's what I pay them for' or 'wow, that was great, here's more work.'

We do a good deed and feel punished. It would be nice to feel appreciated – even if you're just doing your job – like you do. We'd like to hear Jesus say "You are doing good things. Keep going! Thank you!"

Maybe that's what Jesus was getting at. Maybe he was trying to tell his disciples that while you may find yourself feeling punished, God sees your faith. God sees your faith and affirms it. God is thankful for you.

How many of you remember being told by a parent, or grandparent, or another adult that you should always say “Please” and “Thank You”? Think really hard.

Which one do you say more?

I’ve stopped being shocked by the fact that during the prayers of the people, there are usually so many more “please” prayers than there are “thank you” prayers. It’s not that the “please” prayers aren’t legitimate or needed. It’s just that we seem to have lost the urgency of “thank you.”

It reminds me of the soprano solo in Leonard Bernstein’s 1971 masterpiece

“MASS”:

*There once were days so bright, and nights when every cricket call seemed right.*

*And I sang Gloria. And I sang Gracias Deo.*

*I knew the glorious feeling of “thank you” and “thank you”.*

...

*And now, it’s strange, somehow, though nothing much has really changed*

*I miss the Gloria. I don’t sing Gracias Deo.*

*I can’t say quite when it happened but gone is the “thank you”.*

When we are grateful for what we have, we are more likely to give to others.

When we are grateful for our relationships with each other, we are more likely to reach out and create new ones. When we are grateful for the smallest acts, we are more likely to respond to larger ones with increased thankfulness.

When gratefulness disappears, and the ability to receive the gratefulness of others disappears, so does our ability to have faith. Without thankfulness, it's hard to trust one another. Without thankfulness, it's hard to trust God.

I can't say quite when it happened, but a lack of thankfulness has been going on in our civic life for a very long time. I guarantee that it's not been in the last three years. It's been much longer than that. And, for each day, each week, each year we continue down a path of ungratefulness, the less and less we trust each other and our institutions and the further down the path of chaos we descend.

Imagine what would happen if our leaders in government and business and nonprofits and schools concentrated on being thankful instead of covering their behinds. What would happen if we were more thankful for our children – all our children. Or, if we were more thankful for our food and how it gets to our tables.

How would your workplace change if supervisors said ‘thank you’ for your efforts, even though it’s what you’ve agreed to and get paid to do?

How would life at home be different if you thanked someone who did your laundry, or cooked your dinner, or got you to practice or school or the airport.

Let me say from experience that the more thankful I learned to be, the less angry and more patient I became. Now, I’m also aware that I fail at this now and again.

However, the more thankful I am for what I have, the less I find I need.

Thankfulness leads me into a better relationship with God, with others, and with myself.

Which brings me to say:

I’m thankful for all of you here today. Thank you for being here. And, though it may sound like an airplane speech, I know you had options this morning. I’m glad you chose worship at Redeemer. I’m not being snarky. It’s from the bottom of my heart.

Thank you for living out the faith you promised to live. If you’re not feeling particularly faithful this morning, thank you for giving it a good old college try.

Thank you for the work that gets done in this building and outside of it. Thank you for taking your faith into your homes and workplaces and schools and boardrooms. I know it's not easy. I know you struggle. You've shared your stories with me. (Thank you for trusting me!) I'm thankful that you do what you do even when you don't feel like doing it.

I believe God is thankful when we recognize that nothing – absolutely nothing – that we have is possible without God. The air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the love we feel, they are all gifts. When we give God thanks, the response is to want to do more – not because we must, but because we want to.

Lord, increase our faith. Help us to become the people you know we can be.

Gloria.