

The Man Who Said Thank You—Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost, Year C
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI
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I've been in church pews enough to have heard just about every possible pitch for money. I've heard the "woe is us the building is falling down" pitch, and I've heard the "we want to build a new parish hall" pitch. I've even heard the "God loves a cheerful giver" pitch, though usually the person saying it to me is not cheerful at all and is, in fact, a little aggressive. There's one pitch that I particularly loathe, and I cringe everytime I'm in a religious setting and someone is about to ask me for money. It goes something like this: You know, friends, you should give the church all your money because, really, all that money is God's anyway.

I suppose I see where the pitch is coming from, and in a way, I can intellectually appreciate that all that I have is part of a larger creation that is God's. But still, I don't remember God filling out a W-2, and I don't remember God going to school, getting qualified for work and then clocking 50–60 hours a week. I'm pretty sure the 131 emails in my inbox right this second are not addressed to God but are, instead, addressed to The Reverend Ian Burch. So, it's a little cheeky for someone to stand in front of me and tell me that giving in church should be no big deal. Of course it's a big deal. I see where they're selling, but I'm not sure I'm buying.

God never gave me, and never gave you, anything as ephemeral, transient, arbitrary and sometimes silly as money. Not even once. God is in the business of the big stuff. When you open your eyes in the morning time, and the sun has just come up, you are alive because of the grace of God. As you move through this world and experience the sensation of time, the sensation of love, the sensation of wisdom—these are the gifts from God. When you sit in the sure knowledge of your identity as a loved and redeemed child of God, that is when you know a true and princely treasure. You are created by God. You are called by God. You are loved by God, and you are sent by God. God deals in the big stuff.

So, I won't really pitch to you on this first Sunday of our Stewardship Campaign, 'cause I'm not sure that the preacher trying to part you from your wallets works very well.

But, I will talk a bit about the gratitude I see in the gospel story this morning. These ten people suffering from a terrible disease came up to Jesus. Jesus tells them to receive a blessing from the priests, and they are all healed. Nine of the ten never come to say thank you. But one, the one who is a Samaritan and not even of the same religion as Jesus, remembers to come back and to thank Jesus for the gift of life. Just one. The man prostrated himself on the ground before Jesus and thanked him for life. One faithful man remembered that his healing, his life belongs to Jesus, to God.

So, I hope that as we move through these next few weeks, celebrating all that we've accomplished for the mission and ministry of God, we will remember the one man who was grateful. The one man who came to Jesus and remembered to say thank you. As we dream about

2017 and what is in store for St. Mark's, I hope we remember the author of our life, the benefactor of our existence.

God knows, I have forgotten to stop and say thank you to God for the magnificent gifts in this life—for love, faith, friendship, time. But I will do my best to remember the example of the man who remembered to come back and say thank you. I can't promise that I will fall down prostrate like the Samaritan, but I will try to access a place of gratitude in my spirit for the gift of life so freely given by God.

And I will try to remember to be thankful for this community of faith. For the believers, the seekers, the cradle Episcopalians and those who barely know what an Episcopalian is. I will be grateful for our children, our adults, our students. And I will try to remember the miracle of the liturgy that joins us together each week and sends us out into the world in peace to preach love and justice. In short, I will try to be more like the man who was healed and remembered to say thank you. Because, my friends, all of us who have spent time at this table have been healed—in one way or another.

Let us be good and faithful stewards of the time and the life that God has given to us. Let us be good and faithful stewards of our tradition, the bread and the wine. And let us be good and faithful stewards of this holy place, St. Mark's. I will not ask for your money from this pulpit, but God might ask for your life. Amen.