

Expecting the Unexpected with an Attitude of Gratitude

I have shared before that I served as principal of a Pre-K through 8th school for four years. Among the many facets of the position was the traditional role of discipline. Remember, this was 2001-2005, so there was no physical punishment, thank God. However, one of the tricks that I learned from Sr. Kathleen Wallace, God rest her soul, was to have an astonished look when a child told what “horrible” thing he or she had done to warrant some one-on-one time with the principal. “Ahhhh, No! Please tell me you did not say this to your teacher!” Ninety percent of the time, that was about all I had to do to get the child, even an 8th-grade boy, to become extremely penitent.

I can’t help but think of the response of the original hearers of this Gospel when they heard that it was a SAMARITAN who was the only one to return and thank Jesus when he was healed. Surely this is NOT what could have happened. Please don’t tell me that it was a Samaritan as the only one to express an “attitude of gratitude.” Let’s review why this would come as a shock to the original hearers of this parable and this Gospel.

We look at the region between Samaria and Galilee because people did not dally there. The area was loaded with bandits and robbers. These miscreants were pretty common on the back roads or in the less inhabitant areas. Also, the region of Samaria should stand out for you. Who remembers why your ears should perk every time you hear the word “Samaritan?” Samaritans were despised due to their decision not to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. They were basically shunned and regarded as “bad.” If they had been in the silent movies at the Jerusalem Movie House, the Samaritans would have been booed, hissed, and dried-up figs may have been flung. (Of course, we know there was no such place.)

Here again, we find Jesus using the bad Samaritan as the only person who had done the “right thing.” Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan as the only one who would stop to help the man who had been robbed? However, the Samaritan had a little more figured out. Perhaps he is the one who came back to Jesus, not only healed of his affliction, but also healed in his heart. Healing needs to take place inside as well as outside. We need clean lives as well as clean skin.

Many people worship and pray and generally reject the religious life, seeking only the gifts of God and not the person of Christ. This is why there is an inconsistency between talk and walk. How does this make him different?

The difference could be his “vision.” The nine saw a healer, the immediate source of help for the problem. The Samaritan saw the answer to all his problems, heart and body. The nine saw a useful healer to remove the barrier to getting along with the old life. The Samaritan saw the end to his quest for healing inside, as well as outside.

In the next few weeks, we are going to take a look at our own vision for the next year in our own church. What does the future hold for us here at First Congregational Church/Southwick Congregational Church? What are we willing to give to make this happen? Do we have an “attitude of gratitude” for what we have been given in our respective churches? It takes all of us in this vision to continue the work of spreading the Gospel message here in our church. We don’t know what the future holds for us, but we have been given the tools, the brainpower and the ingenuity to figure it out.

We know that we have to have the right “attitude” to get things done. We also know that sometimes what needs to be done is not always what we want. Look around the church: for those of us at First Congregational Church of Westfield, we know that we have been here since 1679, and in this particular building since 1860. We revere the space and the history that it holds. The “Parish House” was built in 1892. We know that it was renovated in 1960 to solidify the second floor as well as add a staircase to the back. If you look outside, those are the cinderblock parts of the building.

In Southwick, we have been here since 1773. The current sanctuary was built in 1824, with the Old Fellowship Hall built in 1924. The New Fellowship Hall was added in 1957. We, too, revere the space and the history it holds. We even celebrated our anniversary last year.

Good things are happening here, but we have to make sure that we can continue the good work that we have done. If we have died with Christ, we also will live with him. If we endure we shall reign with Christ. That being said, we have to ensure that we exercise our “attitude

of gratitude” in a way that will allow our churches to flourish as we seek to bring the Kingdom, Kin-dom, or Reign of God here on earth in Westfield, Southwick, and beyond. How do we show our thanks for all that has been done for us? How do we demonstrate our thanks to God, not simply make a monetary pledge, and go back on with our lives, like the 9? Don’t be surprised if we are all shown how to do this by someone we never expected. I hope we can all reflect on what we can do to demonstrate our own “Attitude of Gratitude” in the weeks and months to come. Amen!