

history to lean on and to claim as our own.

There's a story about a watch Maker's Daughter in the Netherlands named Corrie Ten Boom – whose family assisted hundreds of Jews during the Second World War. Eventually their home was raided, and they were sent to a German concentration camp.

Corrie and her sister Betsy found themselves in the Ravens Brook Camp which housed more than 2000 women in cramped and miserable conditions. When they arrived, they found a discouraged lot, women at the end of the rope, suffering and without any hope.

Corrie and Betsy took up residence in Barracks 28 – a terrible place with broken windows, backed-up plumbing, overcrowding and to top it all off it had recently become infested with bighing fleas.

"Really, God? As if things weren't bad enough already – now fleas!" Over the coming weeks the sisters began ministering to those in their barracks. They prayed with them, encouraged one another, and read from a small Bible they had smuggled in.

Though the guards were rarely far from earshot, they never seemed to enter the barracks. They soon discovered why.

In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie remembers, "One evening I got back to the barracks late, Betsy was waiting for me, as always, so we could go through the food line together. Her eyes were twinkling. You're looking extraordinarily pleased with yourself" I told her.

"You know, we've never understood why we had so much freedom in the big room. Well, I've found out! That afternoon there'd been confusion in her knitting group about sock sizes, and they'd asked the supervisor to come settle it. But

she wouldn't. She wouldn't step through the door. And neither would the guards. And do you know why? Betsy could not keep the triumph from her voice. Because of the fleas! That's what she said. "That place is crawling with fleas!"

Corrie and Betsy had been able to minister to this group of women, to share Christ and to comfort those who suffered because God had provided fleas.

So here we are, the annual family gatherings will unfold this afternoon and tomorrow. The annual test of what you're grateful for. Don't be shy about saying it's the food, or the weather or the chair you're sitting on.

But maybe, just maybe we can remember remarkable way God has been at work. And if you're real good, you might even remember something that in the moment felt like curse, but turned out to be just one more act of grace given by a God who works through the small stuff to accomplish the big stuff.

Happy Thanksgiving, and may your day be filled with blessed remembering, so that we may be people who rest in the arms of our great and wondrous provider.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

"Remember and be Thankful!"

October 8th, 2023 — Selby United Church — Scripture: Mark 8:1-21

By Rev. Mike Putnam

Well, how's it going? I mean, how's Thanksgiving weekend treating you? Do you have one turkey dinner down, two to go?

In our family, we've had our first Thanksgiving gathering yesterday and our second one is on Monday. It's good to space them out a bit so you can do some intensive training in between – stretching, let your pants out a bit, fast for a day or so!

I don't know how it works in your family, but in many families, Thanksgiving feels like an annual test. You know it's coming, you try to prepare, but in the moment, it always feels like a pop quiz. Your mind goes blank. You tense up. You freeze. "How about we go around the table, and everyone say what you're thankful for this year."

"Oh no! What am I going to say?" Your teenage nephew goes first – "Nothin'". The three-year-old granddaughter – "For the food!" Well, there goes that one...I was going to use that one! Another family member is thankful for the beautiful weather we've been having another is grateful for shelter. It's almost your turn – what will you say?

But that's the thing about these kinds of pop quizzes. We're generally not very good at them. Because in the moment we're not very good at looking much beyond our own immediate circumstances. "Oh...um....uh...I'm thankful for this chair I'm sitting on – it has really nice padding."

I mean, okay, fair enough. But those are all kind of entry level gratitude's. Just look around and grab something that's right before you. But we're gratitude

experts. We've been training for this all year long. Surely, this year we can knock the annual test out of the park with something really profound!

But if you're going to do that, you're going to need to remember something. You'll need to be able to either reach back into the past and pull out one significant event or summarize a whole year's worth of blessings into one nugget of thankfulness. And that's not so easy. This is gratitude with a high degree of difficulty! "I'm just thankful the turkey isn't so dry this year," I blurt out!

But rest assured that this test of gratitude isn't any easier for anyone else. In fact, that's the problem that Jesus is addressing this morning as he and his disciples take a little cruise across the lake.

They've just left the site of another one of Jesus remarkable feeding events and they realize they haven't brought anything to eat. "Oh no! We have nothing! We're all going to starve!" the disciples exclaim! Jesus rolls his eyes.

See, the disciples suffer from the very same thing we do. I'll give it a name. Let's call it a bad case of "Benign Blessing Blindness." That's what they have. And it's pretty easy to get it! It can be contagious. Sometimes it's hereditary. But mostly it's just there...we've all got a touch of it.

Because we can't count on these things all the time, can we? I mean, it was one lucky break, but what do we do next time? I mean sure, thank God for the way things turned out, give thanks for the outcome, but let's not be naïve! We need to plan a little better next time, just be a little more organized.

But here the disciples sit, halfway across the lake, stomachs grumbling and all they can think of is their immediate need. They've already forgotten from where they've come. They're on their way from a miraculous feeding event, where seven loaves of bread were somehow made into more than enough food for 4000 people to eat their fill. But somehow the disciples have compartmentalized this amazing happening as a one off!

Jesus overhears this discussion, and he responds, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"

You see, we justify this as pragmatism. We're just being practical. We've got to look after ourselves, make good decisions, be more independent. But Jesus says, no, this isn't that. This is a problem of your hearts!

Why is that? Because again and again in scripture Jesus shows us that we are meant to live depending on God for what we need most.

And so, our desire for independence, our desire to compartmentalize God's providence, our desire to keep God in the background as we self-actualize isn't a sign of growth and maturity but it's actually a dysfunction of the heart.

What's the antidote to this very human problem? Jesus says it's to remember. It is to remember the blessings of God in your past.

You know, all through the Bible God implores his people to remember. Deuteronomy commands, "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children" (Deut.

4:9).

The Psalmist writes, "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old" (Psalm 77:11).

Isaiah writes "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me..." (Isaiah 46:9).

So, the answer to our bad case of "Benign Blessing Blindness" is twofold. First, we must remember God's providence in the past and also God's protection in the past. For when we recall these things that happened both to us and in history, we find that it makes no sense to assume that independent living is the goal of life.

So first, remember how God has provided for you. Jesus says, "Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand..."

Jesus is taking us back to chapter 6 – thousands of people with no food. Jesus takes a boy's sack lunch and makes it enough for everyone. But that was a long time ago now – weeks or months – I don't know. Ancient history, really.

So now Jesus says, "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets did you pick up?" Well this isn't ancient history – it was five minutes ago! Remember? Remember a long time ago and remember what just happened.

What do we remember? We remember Jesus' compassion. That's what it says. Jesus said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat." Jesus already sees their need. He is not unaware. He's not too busy to notice. And he's not so preoccupied that he misses our

need either.

We remember the way Jesus responds in power. Something powerful has just happened. What sort of power must he possess to take a little and make it a lot? What sort of power must Jesus possess to cast out daemons, to calm storms, to heal wounds and ultimately to raise the dead? A unique power unlike any other.

And we remember the way that Jesus responds with generosity. Our Lord is not stingy. You know my favorite detail in the story of the feeding the 4000? It's this: "The people ate and were satisfied...and there were leftovers." So they all brought their Tupperware containers and filled up the fridge and had sandwiches and turkey a la king for days! Jesus gave them more than enough!

So we have a God who comes to us in our need with compassion, with power and with generosity.

Now, let us remember how God has protected.

First, Jesus offers us a caution in verse 15 – "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." In other words, it's important how you approach Jesus.

The Pharisees don't approach Jesus with eyes of wonder, but with skepticism. Herod does not approach Jesus as the king of kings, but as the one who puts his rule and reign into question. And Jesus is saying this is like yeast - just a little spreads through the whole dough and ruins the batch. Jesus is cautioning us to approach him in faith.

Now let's notice the questions Jesus asks. He gives his disciples a little spiritual memory test. Like a doctor who wants to assess the wellness of your body, Jesus is assessing the wellness of our hearts.

"How much left over when we fed the 5000?" Jesus asks. "12 basketfuls" they

reply. Twelve. That's a Biblically significant number, isn't it? Twelve is the number of tribes in Israel.

Next Jesus asks, "How many basketfuls were left over the second time?" "7 basketfuls" answer the disciples. That's another biblically significant number. Seven is the number of days in the week – it's a number that signifies completion and wholeness. God took 7 days to make creation.

See Jesus is telling us something even in the small numbers. He is doing something here through small details. Jesus is restoring God's people (the twelve tribes) and bringing his creation (which was made in seven days) to a new level of completion.

Even in the simple way that Jesus meets ordinary people's needs he's pointing to something so much bigger. Jesus is redeeming the world through small details.

See, Jesus is at work on the big things through the little things. He's not just feeding a large crowd, he's accomplishing the redemption of the world through some simple food and simple acts of love and generosity. But don't miss the bigger picture.

And this is how our Lord works. God is in the details. And God is at work in the telling of this story.

And so, on this thanksgiving weekend, it's good to count our blessings one by one; the big ones and the small ones too. It is good to remember what God has done. Because when we remember we are set free from the grind of being our own saviours and being set free to rest in the arms of the one who works in power and in generosity through the small things.

But we are not limited by our own experience or by what good things are immediately before us. For we have this sweeping story of God's providence in