

May I speak in the name of God, Giver, Forgiver and Lover. Amen.

One of my regular email subscriptions is to a cartoonist who draws comic cartoons relating to ongoing events in the Anglican Communion. The cartoonist is Dave Walker and he has an unerring ability to poke fun at organized religion. At the time of the Bishop's meeting last month the caption was 'Haven't you wondered what Bishops do at their meetings?'. It accompanied a picture of a bouncy castle with a bunch of bishop's in their mitres jumping up and down. Last week Dave drew a picture of several people walking to church. On top of the picture was the phrase 'These days lots of people are going back to church.' So far so good. But the line underneath reads: 'They have forgotten their keys or handbags or something like that.'

As Dave knows its very easy to get a laugh out of churches.

Now I'm not sure that the healing of the ten lepers was meant to be a satirical story, but it could so easily make a wonderful comic cartoon. In the Gospel story ten people who are sick come looking for healing. They ask Jesus for help, follow his instruction and are then healed. One might think that might have created ten thankful people, but quite the reverse. Just one, and one who had no natural affinity to Jesus at that, bothers to express gratitude.

Now depending how you hear this story you can feel perplexed or saddened at the ingratitude of the nine. Or you can be astonished and heartened at the faithfulness of the one.

Time and again in the scriptures the way of the majority is not the divine way. In fact, in the bible it is more frequently the minority or the few who reveal God's ways. And on one level the story of the healed lepers is simply another reminder of this.

But although it is a story about the faith of one, it is also a story about God's blessing of all. What is truly miraculous about this story of healed lepers is that it is not just the faithful leper who is healed. Rather, all are healed.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the intellectual credibility of Christianity took a beating. As science emerged as a discipline of its own, no longer a slave to theology, it became increasingly difficult for intellectuals to believe the traditions taught by the church. Out of this climate of questioning was written one of the most interesting and riveting books ever to be penned by a theologian. His name was Friedrich Schleiermacher. In 1799 he wrote a wonderful work addressed to "Cultured Despisers of Religion". Schleiermacher argued that the intellectuals who despised so much about religion were correct about many things. He believed they were right to challenge many of the superstitious beliefs that Christianity had become identified with.

On the topic of miracles, though, Schleiermacher invited the cultured despisers to look at the question a different way. For Schleiermacher, stories of healings and miraculous events needed to be understood in a broader context. He wrote that, 'To me, all is miracle'. And for Schleiermacher the miraculous was discovered whenever we look at the world in a certain way.

Arguably the nine who did not give thanks for being healed were a little like the cultured despisers. They didn't see the miracle. They were sick, then they were healed. Simple as that. No reason to give thanks.

Today I believe we find ourselves in a similar situation most of the time. As least I know I do. I find it much easier to empathize with the skeptical cultural despisers or the nine than I do with the grateful Samaritan. And even though I know that I have received blessing after blessing, giving thanks rarely comes easily.

Almost all of us are products of a culture in which skepticism and questioning make it much harder to see the blessing and be grateful.

Recently a group of South Pacific Islanders from the Kastam tribe on the tiny island of Tanna visited England. It was part of a reverse anthropological study in which the five natives explored modern Britain. What was fascinating about their study were some of the things they embraced. They loved going clubbing, as ritual dancing is an important part of their culture. But they

couldn't believe the amount of time the average Briton would spend cleaning. And while they had no problem playing darts in a pub, they couldn't understand how noisy city life was. Perhaps most interesting, though, was the time when they spent a whole hour trying to engage passers by in conversation in the heart of London. If people are too busy to talk they wondered, what kind of life was that? The Kastam left England counting the blessings of their traditional life, completely unimpressed by modern life.

Now I am not suggesting that we all live the life of the Kastam. But I do think that we are asked to see the world from the perspective of the grateful. Unlike the Kastam we are so busy chasing the next thing whatever it is that we risk losing the ability to simply give thanks for the blessings that we have.

The wonderful thing about God is that God blesses us regardless of whether we are particularly faithful or not. But if we are to be partners with God, we need to think about how we respond to those blessings. And we also need to be a little more curious about the nature of our blessings. After all, sometimes a curse in the eyes of the world is the greatest blessing. And sometimes what we assume is blessing is not.

Like it or not, each one of us is like the healed lepers in the story. And even those of us who are physically, mentally or emotionally in need of wholeness and healing. Even then, we are still counted as blessed

beyond measure in God's sight because we are loved and forgiven. And although each one of us has been blessed beyond measure we have done nothing to deserve it. All is grace, and as our collect reminds us, God's grace always precedes and follows us. What remains to be seen is how we choose to respond to the blessings God has given us. Amen.