W Thomas – Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost Christ Episcopal Church, Elizabeth City NC – 10-12-25

You may recall a couple weeks ago, I brought forth from Stephen Covey the notion of the compass and the clock. This is the Stephen Covey who wrote *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. And if you recall when I spoke of the compass and the clock, the idea was when you make decisions and think of things, if they are borne through the clock, you never have enough time to get things done.

So you're focusing on events and things. But if you hold on to what might be the image of the compass, where you put the wisdom that guides you, wherever you find it, perhaps it resides in your heart or your compass, then all of a sudden you're focusing on relationships and people. And the idea was when I ended the sermon, having talked about the cardinal virtues of prudence, which is doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason, and also speaking to the idea of fortitude or courage, another cardinal virtue, as one of the reasons you might sign your pledge card.

It's all the more important that I bring this up again today because you will be receiving your pledge cards to pray over the next few weeks. I ended that sermon with the phrase, what's in your compass, evoking Samuel L. Jackson in a well-known financial services commercial, which makes it all the more appropriate to say again if we have any talk about money. But I'm not really talking so much about money.

And here's what I think I'm talking about. This sermon explores how the habit of saying thank you helps you hold on to the values placed in your compass, which strengthen you to withstand the limitations caused by the demands exerted by your clock. Now, where did the notion I have come to talk about saying thank you today? Well, as you were hearing in the gospel lesson, the lesson of the ten lepers that were healed, and as they went on their way to see the priests and found that they were clean, only one of them turned back and prostrated himself before Jesus, praising God and saying thank you.

And as Jesus commented on this, he noted it was a Samaritan. Now, remember who Jesus' audience is when he's speaking about events like this. It's usually the Pharisees and the people who are rule-bound, who have a certain way of guiding their own sense, whatever they might have put in their compass.

And he's making a point about, wow, how is it possible that one who's not, if you will, one of our own way of doing things, and we know how Samaritans get

put upon in our gospel text because they are great examples of being different as Jesus points them out, how is it this one came back to say thank you? And so for me, hearing that notion of thank you got me thinking about what is it about the word thank you? And in the end, I came to see thank you as an incredible shorthand, a way if you have engaged it from your earliest days, you've learned how to be in relationship with others. How often were you told to say please and thank you? Good, see, stuck with you, huh? This is good. Say thank you.

Oddly enough, for instance, when you sign your pledge card, it's another way of saying thank you to God, and how you process that is another way that you put into prayer. But what is it that the shorthand thank you, being in relationship with others, what is that recalling, whether you know it top of mind or if it simply rests in your heart and occasionally bubbles up more, but it's what guides you well, and by saying thank you over and over again, it reinforces where those values came from. So right now, we can easily lay claim, at least I can, to the notion of the baptismal promises I made when I re-staked the baptismal covenant.

Thank you is bound up when I say that because it reminds me of my relationship with others. So that's one way to look at it. Another way, oddly enough, which surprised me, it's a common courtesy to say thank you to somebody who has offered support for something.

We recently had a fabulous golf tournament designed to raise money to go back out into the community. And I discovered when I said, well, how do we say thank you for this? And I kind of got that, well, we really don't have a good system. So we made up a set of cards, we got it done, and we sent them all out.

I signed them all, we sent them out in the mail to all the donors. I was surprised to find out when somebody said, I couldn't believe I got a thank you card. Well, think of how often you've received a card from somebody, and it's made you smile, and it's a form of thank you and relationship.

I have a classmate from seminary, The Reverend Henry Doyle, who for all of our classmates and probably beyond, he knows everybody's birthday, he knows everybody's anniversary, and we get what we call a *Henrygram*. My kids look forward to getting their birthday cards from Henry. He's been doing it since they were born and earlier to us with our anniversaries.

I mean, that is a form of being in relationship. And as you look at what are the values that are held in your compass, I look at, for myself, I'll have one value that's more recent than the one I'm going to close with. It would have been as when I was brought into the Army as a chaplain, and I became a commissioned

officer, and I swore my oath to defend and support the Constitution of the United States against all enemies.

So that would be one that would form and inform me as to how I ought to live and then be in relationship with others. But I think the earliest one that really got to me, and I think I may have mentioned it to you before, and I'm doing this to simply ask you to think about that which is in your compass, that when you say thank you, is something that reminds you, if you thought about it more deeply, of how you learn the depth and breadth of being in relationship that thank you offers. And for me, it was the training I received as a Boy Scout.

Let's see if I can do this. *On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country, and to obey the Scout law, to help other people at all times, to keep myself mentally strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.* And I've known that since I was 11 years old, and maybe I've lived it.

When I pick up a piece of trash, and I try to do that almost every day, there's always a piece of trash, it's like doing a good turn daily. But more importantly, it's the Scout law that really is the repository as I go back to the guiding values that bring me into relationship when I say thank you. *A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.*

Now, when you listen to what I said in the oath, and what I said in the law, and I looked at it and tried to see how it affected me, I realized we were never told in the law or the oath to say thank you. Now, if it came out of the Scout as courteous, that's fine. But what grows out of that habit, if you're courteous to somebody, you see them as a full and complete person.

You want to help them, you want to do all of these things, you want to be in relationship. And when Jesus is speaking about, wow, this one came back who wanted to be in relationship and said thank you, he came out of what would have been the compass portion where the others were running off to celebrate the clock portion of what had happened. Look what happened to me.

Now, maybe they gave thanks in those other meetings, but we don't know. When you have an opportunity to say thank you to God, such as will be given to you today and then you can ponder over the next few weeks, my hope is that you will find something that guides you, a prayer that we've put with a document or some other thing, that when you say yes to God and you sign your name and you help the vestry do its prudent work, the right thing at the right time with what they've been given to work with, you will continue to set this parish up for its next 200 years, which will clearly begin with the next rector that is called. So I say to you, when you're thinking about the relationship that

you declare when you say thank you, give thanks to the search committee and the work that they're doing, give thanks for the vestry and the work that they're doing, and let us just give thanks for the 200 years that work has been done here in this place and our opportunity to continue to participate in it.

So I say to you, perhaps not so much what is in your compass, but take a look and gently say to yourself this, what am I placing in the envelope of my pledge card?

All these words I offer in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.