

## Transcript Sermon 2 Thanksliving 2018

My friends, as always, I speak to you in the name of the one who is our hope and salvation, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

So as Maria pointed out, you have an insert this week that we had last week, because we've moved into a season of thinking about our lives as stewards. Stewards and discipleship and all of that go together. Most times in our churches, we think about stewardship as just a time of asking for money. Well, yes. But that's because money is a symbol of our lives. Stewardship is actually about how we live in response to God. And so, we chose as our theme this year to play on that word Thanksgiving, because we thought to start it at Thanksgiving weekend last weekend and change one letter, from Thanksgiving to ThanksLiving. That moves us away from giving thanks to living thanks. Last week, we talked about it as an attitude; that it begins in an attitude of where we are. This week I want to extend from that.

Where I'd like to start though, is with a story that I first told you in my very first sermon, a little over 9 years ago if you can believe how time flies. I've used it periodically since then, because it's a story that's so important about understanding how we learn, how we teach, how we share and how we build a community. So, this is a story of long ago. Long ago, there was a wise Sufi mystic in the Middle East. He lived near a town. In the towns people thought we really need to hear from Sufi Ansari. We need to bring him here and ask him to speak to us about the meaning of life. So, the elders went and they beseeched Sufi Ansari. Finally, he said, 'okay, I'll come.' So, he came into their midst. He stood in their midst and he looked at them all and he said, 'who here knows the meaning of life?' They didn't want to dishonour him. They want to show him absolute respect, so nobody dared to raise their hands or say 'I do'. They just stayed quiet. Original Anglicans. He said, 'well if you can't even be bothered to think the question yourselves, I have nothing to teach you.' And he left. The elders said, 'this isn't good enough, we really need to hear from Sufi Ansari.' So, they went and beseeched him again to come. This time he came in and they were ready for him. Then he said, 'here who knows the meaning of life?' They all put their hands up. He said, 'well if you all know the answer, I have nothing to teach you.' And he left. This certainly wasn't good enough, so they implored him one more time to come. This time they were truly ready for him. When it came to the question 'who knows the meaning of life', half of them put up their hands and half didn't. He said. 'good, those of you who know, speak to those who don't.' And he left.

Now a story from more contemporary times. There is a woman. All was going well in her life, but she felt she needed to seek the services of a spiritual director. So, this individual went to meet with the spiritual director for the first time. After greeting one another, the spiritual director got down to business and asked, to whom do you

owe your life?’ After a few minutes of thought, the client, the directee gave the following response. ‘Well I suppose first and foremost to my parents, and the love and care and support and sacrifices that they made for my wellbeing and development.’ ‘And?’ Prodded the spiritual director. ‘Well obviously to my extended family, my grandparents and all of the members of my extended family for their love and care. And oh, to my siblings as well, because I have an extraordinarily good bond with them.’ ‘And?’ Prodded the spiritual director again. ‘Well a lot of thanks goes to my teachers, particularly in high school, the ones who believed in me, even when I was struggling and encouraged me to chase after my dream of college and career. And then in university there were a couple fantastic professors and TA’s who open my eyes and gave such wonderful encouragement so that I build confidence in myself.’ ‘And?’ Prodded the spiritual director. ‘Well I suppose my first boss,’ replied the aspirant. ‘She gave me a chance to prove myself and blossom, even when I had little experience.’ ‘And?’ Prodded the spiritual director. This is why it’s so much fun giving spiritual direction. ‘Well, I probably should have started with my spouse,’ she said. ‘My soul mate and partner for so many years.’ ‘And?’ Prodded the spiritual director one last time. ‘That’s about it,’ said the client. ‘Those are all the important people in my life. The ones to whom I owe and dedicate my life.’ ‘Then,’ said the spiritual director, ‘I cannot be your spiritual director.’ And the aspirant said, ‘Why not?’

So, I want to revisit Sufi Ansari for a moment and now we get interactive. How many of you know why the spiritual director could not be this person’s spiritual director? How many of you know the answer to ‘why not?’ How many of you don’t have a clue what I’m talking about? How many of you don’t know the answer? Be honest. Okay. I’m going to give you two minutes to find each other; somebody with the answer and somebody who doesn’t have the answer and talk about it. You’ve got two minutes. Why can’t the spiritual director take on this directee? That means you can talk! (...) Okay, you probably don’t need the full two minutes. You probably really need two hours. I may give you the response as I have it. The aspirant said ‘why not?’ And the spiritual director said, ‘because you are in the path of self-absorption. And I am a director and guide of the spirit, which is not of self but of God.’ ‘I don’t get what you mean’, the aspirant said. The spiritual director replied, ‘for the journey of faith, there is only one answer to the question to whom do you owe your life, and that answer is to God.’ That is the beginning of the way of the spirit, which is ultimately the way discovering one’s true self.

Last week we explored, as I said, ThanksLiving as an attitude. This week I want to think about it as a way, a pilgrimage. The place of departure on that is to give our life where it is owed, which is to God. In scripture it’s talked about that we are the temples. Our bodies are the temples; holy things of God. We’re created in the image of God. That means something and it means something important. It also says something to the understanding of being sacrificial. Peter gets this and this one. We’ve had this whole conversation about this rich person coming and saying, ‘well I’ve fulfilled the law, I’m good, I’m religious.’ Jesus said, ‘no, there’s something

you're missing. Your first duty is to your staff and it can't be. Your first duty has to be to God.' It was depressing for that individual who had so much. How do I let go? How do I make that happen? Jesus, the important words are said, 'get rid of it all and come and follow me.' He didn't say, 'get rid of it all and see what's it's like to live on the street, because you have nothing.' He said, 'come and follow me.' It's about putting God in front of the cart, which is our lives, instead of behind the cart assuming that God will follow wherever we go and make it okay and say it's good. It's the other way around. We're called to follow God, to walk with Jesus. Peter says, 'we've given up everything to follow you. We've given up everything.' Jesus says, 'but you will receive more.'

It's that same story of Job, what Job would not do even though he lost sight of God, even though he didn't feel God's presence left, right, front, behind. He never denied God and even his friends tried to say that 'just curse God, leave it and go on. God doesn't love you.' He said, 'no I will not.' He held through and everything was restored. It's interesting to note that we don't often think about God as a betting being. But this was from a divine bet. The antagonist, the figure of Satan in the councils of heaven says to God, 'I bet I can make Job deny you.' God took the bet. And Job did not, because God's presence was fully with him, even when Job didn't know it. That's the story that we have. We said in the Shema Yisrael, and we do say that the summary of the law to love the Lord, your God. It goes "*Hear, O Israel, love the Lord, your God with all your heart, your mind, your soul and your strength; your very being. And love your neighbour as yourself.*" A lot of us try to strive to get to God by loving people as much as we can, thinking that will get us to God. Actually, it's the other way around. If we love God with our whole being, then we will live into being able to love others truly, even when we don't like them and they don't like us. You see, built in the image of God, made in the image of God, created in the image of God. Whatever what you want to hold into that, means there's something of God within us. It also means that we have to love ourselves as we love others, because that's what that says. It says 'love your neighbour as yourself.' So much of our world despairs and does not love self. Our world says 'you aren't worthy.' That is a central message of our commercial world. You are not worthy unless you get the latest product to make you worthy. Then you're still not worthy, because you really didn't get the right accessory. Then you still don't look right, because you don't have the right makeup. Then you still don't look right, because you don't have the right thing. You don't eat right. You don't do this right. You're not doing yoga. You're not doing and it's all adrift. Wherever you, go the world says 'you're not okay.' Gods starting point is 'oh yes you are. You in the image of God are Gods perfection. You are loved.'

That's where healing and grace and shifting from attitude into ThanksLiving in the way of pilgrimage and action begins for me. That you can hold into that. That you can do what we did a moment ago and talk with each other and share your faith. You know, that's where evangelism and growth and everything happens; is

there not for me. Statistics about church development are really bad about what priests and clergy can do. We're maybe responsible for 7 percent growth. 93 percent is from what the community does. It starts from that, loving yourselves. Loving each other. Then you'll support each other, wherever anybody is. Everybody, no matter whether they're struggling like Job, whether they're broken, whether their mind and spirit is fractured, needs to be loved. Sometimes you'll give more; sometimes you'll receive more. But that is the community we're called to be.

So, my friends, as we think about ThanksLiving, our purpose here at St. George's is that. It's defined in our catechesis. The purpose of the church, which is the people of God. The reason we exist is to restore all people into relationship with God. We can't do that if it doesn't start with us putting God first. You don't lose anything. You don't lose anything. You come to know that those relationships in your life mean more because you put God first, because you see them as gift in your life. You see them as joy and hope, even with the foibles and the hurts and the pains and the struggles and all that we take on. So, don't let the world distract you from the truth. Hold to God, knowing that God will hold to you, even when you can't see God left, right, front, back, above or below. God is there. Cling to that holy hope and know that you are loved and beloved. And live that to your neighbours, particularly to the ones who don't want to know it.