

**SERMON ON 5TH OCTOBER 2025: THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY:
OS27c SUNDAY BETWEEN 2 AND 8 OCTOBER: GEOFF CHADWICK
LK 17:5-10: “NO THANKS “**

Luke 17.5-10

⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’ ⁶ The Lord replied, ‘If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, “Be uprooted and planted in the sea”, and it would obey you. ⁷ ‘Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, “Come here at once and take your place at the table”? ⁸ Would you not rather say to him, “Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink”? ⁹ Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, “We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!” ’

There is a wonderful English movie called *Nativity!* (Released in 2009). It’s the story of a small disadvantaged school putting on a musical nativity play at an eisteddfod in competition with some more well-to-do schools. At the centre is teacher Mr Maddens, who tracks down his former girlfriend (Jennifer). He thinks she has big connections in the Hollywood movie business and pleads to get some sponsorship through her. Unfortunately, she is not a “big-wig” in the industry and is really “*just a secretary*”. Nevertheless, in an effort to persuade her boss that the play is worth supporting she says to him:

Mr Parker, I need you to do this for me. I have worked here for three years and... every morning at ten to eight I take your coat, I hang it up. At nine o'clock I get you your coffee, I put it on your table. I take away the letters, I put them into the out box, I take the other letters and put them into the in box. I file, I fax, I smile.

The Boss replies:
Jennifer, that's what you're paid to do!

At which point she replies:
I know.

https://transcripts.foreverdreaming.org/viewtopic.php?t=133175#google_vignette

Why have I mentioned this? Well it’s similar to what Jesus says in today’s Gospel reading:

Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, “Come here at once and take your place at the table”? ⁸ Would you not rather say to him, “Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink”? ⁹ Do you thank the

slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, “We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!” ’ (Lk 17:7-10, NRSV)

At first this seems a little hash. We think:

Surely the master should show his gratitude to the slave and thank him for what he has done?

But Jesus is using an everyday example from the culture of his time. Slaves and servants were expected to get on with their work regardless of whether they were thanked or not.

Generally speaking, thanks was not part of the deal.

So what’s this about?

Context is everything!

Remember, Luke has compiled his Gospel to address the issues of the early church of around AD90. He does this by selecting certain remembered sayings of Jesus and applies them to his present situation. So it appears that there were church workers, probably volunteers, who were demanding that they get thanked for their church work. They’re faithful, yes, in their tasks, but were hoping, without success, for some gratitude or thanks. It seems this resulted in heated squabbling in the church!

Jesus’ comment is a stark reminder that ministry should be its own reward. Looking for praise or gratitude may be boosting one’s own ego dangerously.

I remember as a young curate, saying to my supervisor that I got very little thanks for what I did in the parish. In fact, I was getting disheartened by it. To my surprise, my wise supervisor quoted this passage to me! Expecting sympathy, I got a challenge! I had to examine my own conscience and ask if I was ministering to people because I thought I would be fed by their thanks. I quickly learnt that this is a recipe for despair.

Yes, I had many tasks: and yes, they were my job!

That's not to say that words of thanks or appreciation didn't come my way. The point was not to expect such things, and to be surprised when they came.

This goes for all of us who are in ministry-and that's all of us who call ourselves a follower of Jesus. Jesus gives us work to do! Some of it is not pleasant, and some of it goes unnoticed. Yet we do it, because of our faithfulness. Not because of any thanks we may or might not get.

Curiously, the builders of old, who built our ancient cathedrals, put as much craft into the sections not seen by the people, as into those sections which were visible. Sculptures hidden behind walls or in lofty places were just as exquisite as those visible to the naked eye. The reason is simple, the builders understood that what they were crafting was an offering to God. In a sense they believed God could see it, and they knew that faithfulness requires excellence. (I wonder how many modern builders today, build as if God were watching them!)

I say excellence, not perfection, as we don't want to fall into the neurotic trap of perfectionism. By "*excellence*" I mean "*offering one's best under the circumstances*".

So I wonder if a lack of thanks is "getting under your skin?"

- Are you getting jaded?
- Are you wanting to give up?
- Are you jealous when others get accolades and you miss out?

That's to be understood. That's part of our human nature. And that's what was going on in Luke's church.

But we are called to a higher motivation. That is faithfulness. Ministering, for ministry's own sake, and ministering because we do it for God.

I want to be careful here. I'm not saying to "*soldier on*" or to keep at something when it is obviously fruitless or soul destroying. I'm talking about getting the motivation right. It's ministering without a desire for accolades.

Having said all of this I do think there is a place for accolades and gratitude. There's nothing wrong with giving praise where praise is due. After all, God calls us to be thankful people.

Sometimes thanks comes to us in the strangest of ways:

Ten years after I had worked really hard on a difficult 16 year old during a 10 day Outward Bound hike in the bush, a chance encounter would have him say to me:

Fr Geoff, let me shake your hand. Thanks for all you did for me on Outward Bound. Whenever I went off the rails, it was a fair cop!"

Ten years earlier in the bush, at the time, I was just doing my job!

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.