Thanksgiving, the day on which we as a country give thanks, seems remarkably simple, and in so many, many ways, it is. Likewise the upshot take away messages of these passages today are also quite simple, even if some of the reading of the texts may not be.

Let’s first start with the simple and move to the more complicated aspects of these passages. For Thanksgiving day, we have these texts in conversation. For some of the passages it is easy to see why they are included on Thanksgiving. The Old Testament passage is a brilliant example. This is a retelling of Moses entering the Promised Land of Israel. Moses offers the people of Israel a reframing. Rather than Israel looking at events through the lens of what all they think they have accomplished as self-made persons or a self-made nation, they are called to look instead at the gifts that God, the creator and provider has given. We would do well to do this as well.

The psalm is a beautiful exposition. As a psalm of communal thanksgiving, it details all the ways that God acts in a community’s life. God acts in so many ways—- God personally interacts by hearing us, blotting out our sins, and calling all people to be in relationship with God. God is the force behind creation—- God is the one who waters and gives life. Most of the time, most people can get behind the intention of the psalm. Of course, there can be too much of a good thing, there are times, after perhaps a hurricane that God, the one that waters the earth, seems a praise not worth making or remembering. There are always times when someone’s blessings can feel like a curse. Yet, I invite you to think of the God of life, that through bad times and harshness, after tragedies, it is God always bringing forth life. Of course, there were tough times in the life of the peoples at the time of the psalmist, but the world was not as well connected as the world we now live in. There seems always to be a tragedy around the door. Still, God brings all into life, brings into flourishing, allows the potential for goodness. This is who God is for us and for all creation, then and now.

The second letter to the Corinthians teaches us that, as is often the case, we are to give as God gives. God freely blesses in a way that is over the top, so very much, and we are to do the same giving to the neighbor who is less fortunate. We show thanks to God by giving. We give to others, we let our good fortune be seen by what we give. In fact, there is no other reason ever to be stingy with our giving. Our good fortune may or may not include material wealth. But the true good fortune, the primary blessing of our lives, is our relationship with God through Jesus. That we have come to know God is how we are blessed. And the answer to that blessing is to give as God shows us how to give. God gives with wild abandon. As we are shown by Jesus, we are to give with wild abandon. We are not to give out of any sort of guilt or obligation, but out of our cheerfulness that we are blessed, blessed to know who God is and be loved. So we are not to give only our blessings or only our wealth, or only our talents, we give in all the ways we have been blessed, mirroring how God gives to us.

The epistle nicely segues into the Gospel. The more complicated stuff is, as it often is, in the Gospel. In many ways it is a trap for us to dissect or ignore parts of this Gospel. Because we are mortal, because our bodies are by nature fallible and and fail us on occasion, (and in all honesty, we probably shouldn’t think of it as our bodies failing, but just that they are made this way, we are made to become old,), But because we get old and diseased and at the same time have a relationship with God, we like to think that there is some exchange that we are guaranteed: we say our prayers and so God will then heal us. And only if it were that simple, but it isn’t. Just as God’s rain falls on the just and the unjust, healing sometimes comes and sometimes it doesn’t. Or probably said better, healing always comes, but not always as a cure, and not always as what we thought our healing ought to be. We may instead be healed to accept an illness. However, any physical healing has little or nothing to do with your own piety or how your relationship is with God. Look closely at this passage, Jesus heals all, Jesus heals ALL 10 lepers…all of them healed. One assumes (and it is probably a good assumption) that the 9 who didn’t come back were Israelites. Perhaps the Israelites expected their healing as quid pro quo for their belief in the one true God of Israel. It is the Samaritan (as it often is in the Gospel of Luke) who returns to express his gratitude for his healing. Do not forget—ALL of them are healed; the healing has nothing to do with their faith.

What Jesus commends in the Samaritan is his expression of gratitude. Jesus teaches us the novelty that being thankful IS having faith. The giving of thanks, showing gratitude… that shows the world that one has that God exists, that God specifically answers one person’s prayers, it acknowledges that God is overly generous, abundant and indiscriminate in giving. God in Jesus is pleased by this because God desires our relationship. God does not need our thanks, but it is, in fact what constitutes true faith. Realizing that all gifts given come from God and staying in relationship to offer praise and thanksgiving to God…. this is having faith.