

**Proper 23, Year C (RCL) – *Why Do We Need to Praise God?*
2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19; Psalm 111
The Rev. Skip Bushee – 10/14/07**

Most of you know that I spent most of my secular career in Silicon Valley. I pretty much experienced it all – startups, turnarounds, venture capital, you name it. I even co-founded a company, InfoCorp, which had a run of success. About the only thing I didn't do was get rich, at least in monetary terms.

Working all those years in Silicon Valley I came to realize what a Godless place it is. There is only one god worshiped there, the god of wealth. People pursue wealth not for what it can buy or the good that can be done with it but simply to accumulate as much of it as possible. People work tirelessly at the expense of their families and even their own health. There is no consideration for others; if one can get a little more at the expense of others, even friends and family, so be it. I have seen it happen so many times.

As you might expect, this culture of the pursuit of wealth creates a society where few are happy or satisfied. Either you find people who have sacrificed everything in the pursuit of riches and have failed, leaving them broken and bitter, or you have the few that have succeeded and have found their lives empty of meaning. In their zeal, they have lost wives and families and have little to show except for their big houses and bank accounts. And so they continue to pursue even more wealth, thinking that having that much more will make them happy. It never does.

I am telling you all of this so that you will understand why, when I first felt a call to ordained ministry, I wanted to find a way to minister to the lost souls of Silicon Valley. I was encouraged in this endeavor by the book, Soul & Silicon, by Carl Goldman, where the author's in-depth interviews of hundreds of Silicon Valley employees and entrepreneurs showed a tremendous need for spiritual awakening.

However, my attempts at ministry in this area all proved fruitless for one simple reason: people who are young, healthy and employed feel in control of their lives and believe they have no need for a relationship with God. Generally, it is only when our worlds are disrupted by challenges such as illness, loss of a loved one or financial hardship, that we begin to realize that we are ultimately powerless and need God in our lives.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus encounters just such people. In biblical times, leprosy was a horrible disease. Not only did it grotesquely disfigure the sufferers but they became outcasts from society. Jewish law declared them unclean and prohibited them from coming in contact with those not afflicted. While on his way to Jerusalem for his fateful encounter with the cross, Jesus was approached by 10 lepers who begged for mercy. Healing them, Jesus instructed them to show themselves to the priests, presumably so they could be declared ritually clean and enable them to reenter normal society.

Here is where the story takes a surprising turn. Nine of the former lepers, presumably Jews, showed no gratitude but reentered society as if nothing had happened, as if they

had caused their own cleansing and were in complete control of their lives. Only one of the former lepers, a Samaritan who was still an outcast from Jewish society because of his ethnicity, returned to give thanks. The Jews, who were the heirs of the covenant with Abraham, seemed to take the gift of new life for granted.

As I read this story, I cannot help thinking of the people of Silicon Valley. Like all of us, they are heirs of the new covenant. They owe their health, their jobs and wealth, even their very lives to the grace of a loving God. But do they show their gratitude? Like the Jews in the story of the 10 lepers, they go about their lives, acting as if their good fortune was all of their own doing.

This begs an interesting theological question: why do we need to praise God and give thanks for our blessings anyway? Is God so insecure as to need constant adulation from his creation?

I think not. If God required our constant adulation to satisfy some cosmic ego, God would be like the Cesar character portrayed by Dom DeLuise in Mel Brooks' History of the World, Part I, a fat, narcissistic tyrant dispensing judgment in an uncaring and blasé fashion from a bed of cushions.

This is not the God I envision. This is not the God who would come among us in human form to give us an example of how to live righteous and productive lives and then end up being crucified for his efforts.

The God I envision is loving and caring beyond measure. This God needs no adulation and is constantly at work in the world through us as his agents for the benefit of creation. If this God requires us to acknowledge and praise God, it is for our own benefit, not God's.

We gather at St. Peter's each week not out of a sense of duty and obligation but to renew our faith in community with one another. It is no accident that we open our service with a hymn of praise, the Gloria, not out of obligation to satisfy a vengeful and narcissistic god but to open our own hearts to God's love and grace and to prepare ourselves to be enlightened by hearing the word and to receive the spiritual food of the Eucharist. We then go into the world each week modeling our lives as Christians for others and occasionally doing acts of love and kindness toward others, not because God will be angry at us if we don't but because our own lives will be richer and fuller as a result.

The alternative is to be like the nine Jews who accepted God's gift of healing without acknowledgement or to be like so many in Silicon Valley who do the same. I promise you that these people, though they may enjoy material abundance, ultimately lead empty and unfulfilled lives. They go to their deaths knowing that their wealth will belong to someone else and their accomplishments will be soon forgotten. Just ask anyone who knows successful Silicon Valley entrepreneurs if these people are happy and fulfilled. I have met two of the most famous and successful, Steve Jobs and Larry Ellison and

believe me, these are not happy people. Driven, yes, but not people you would choose to be around.

I said earlier that my years in Silicon Valley did not make me rich in monetary terms. Believe me, there were many times when I asked God to help me close an important deal or to lead my company to a lucrative IPO but God had other plans. Through a series of setbacks, I finally came to realize what is truly important in life: family, friends, a loving Church community, and, most of all, a relationship with a loving God. Larry and Steve can have their millions. I am by far the wealthier.