

Jamie handed a package to the child in the hospital bed. Although there were words it was the gestures that mattered. The handing over was tentative. Jamie was 15. She was from a group home in Ontario. The child, like all the other children in the ward, was from one village or another in the area surrounding the town in Guatemala where Jamie and the other young people in the team had come to spend 8 days helping out at the hospital.

The child, a little boy about seven years old, reached out and received the package as if it were made of gold. He looked at it in his hands, turning it, feeling it, careful not to crease the paper. He looked up at Jamie with wide-open eyes. "Go on," she said, "open it. Just tear the paper." The little boy carefully peeled back the tape, gently smoothing the wrapping paper out. He held a note pad of some twenty blank sheets and a small pack of crayons. "Gracias" he said, beaming delight, almost unable to believe what he had been given.

Jamie's group had brought enough of these packages for all the children's beds in the hospital. The trip had been planned to give the children a little extra attention as parents could not easily be present, and the nurses were few in number. Medical supplies had taken up the most space, but a few fun things had been brought. Crayons, paper, balloons.

Jamie came and spoke to our church group to tell us about the trip. Our church had helped raise money to pay for the airfares.

She told us that she always thought it was unfair that she had to live in a group home and not have her own computer and had to live in a small space in a shared room. She said she thought she had a worse life than anyone she knew.

Then she told us about the kids and the paper. Every morning when they got to the hospital they would visit the kids in the wards. All the kids were doing the same thing. They only used one sheet of paper a day. They coloured them and drew on them, covering every bit of the sheet until there was room for no more art. Then they would turn the paper over and do another drawing on the other side. By the end of the week they still had most of the paper left and still had only used the beginnings of the crayons. They conserved everything from those packages so carefully, and were genuine in the thanks they repeated to Jamie and the others every time they came in. Jamie was struck, not just by the way they treasured these, but by the way they kept saying "Thank you" to her.

Some time later I was talking with the person who organized and supervised the trip. We spoke about what Jamie had said.

My friend said, "Here in Canada there is so much. Everyone, even the people in the group home, has lots of stuff. The children in the hospital had nothing. No toys, no TV, no ability to get out of bed and run around. Nothing. When you have nothing you notice what little is given to you. The little is a treasure. When it is given you are filled with gratitude. When you have much, but someone else has more, even a little more, what you notice is the little you don't have. The little is like an insult. You are filled with pain because of what you don't have." She told me Jamie was changed by that trip.

In a Middle Eastern country a gang of men had come together. They had AIDS and each had been chased out of his village as the first signs began to show. If they came close to a market or anywhere people gathered they would receive a hail of stones and shouts of anger. "Get away from us you sick men! Keep your disease away from me and my children!" One of the men, Yousef, thought of his children. His little son; just learning to walk; his smile with two teeth only, his gurgling laughter. He thought of his two daughters, their long dark hair and brown eyes and the way they would jump on him and pull his beard until he told them stories and tickled them. His wife, his mother and his sisters in the village. His father's grave. And his work as an olive grower. All this was gone. He felt shame and anger and hopelessness.

But there was talk of a holy man who healed people. The other men, the men who he worked with now, stealing food to live, begging, surviving, protecting each other, men who would have shunned each other had they not been in the same boat now. They all came from where the holy man came from. "He can heal us," they said, "maybe." So they stood beside the road, on a rise of ground, just a stone's throw away from where

travelers walked. And when a big crowd came along they started up shouting and begging and waving and saying, "Jesus, hey Jesus! Help us! Have mercy on us!"

It was on the way to the town, where they could get properly tested and a certificate to prove they were better, that Yousef stopped. They had heard Jesus say something, and something else. The wind took the words away, but they heard him tell them to get checked out properly for the cure. They looked at the sores that had been the first, and now the big, weeping, ugly marks of the illness, and they were gone! GONE! They checked other places and were astonished. They *ran* to get their papers. Yousef imagined hugging his children, kissing his wife, sleeping in his bed again. He could hardly wait. But he stopped. He had forgotten the holy man. He turned around and ran, ran faster and hurtled towards the crowd he had so quickly run from. Like a baseball player making first base, he skidded, in a cloud of dust, to a kneeling stop at the feet of the man. "Sir, Jesus, holy man. Thank you. Thank you for my life back. Thank you for stopping for us. Thank you for my family. Thank you."

Why did he stop? Why was he the one who was filled with a huge need to give thanks to Jesus? Where is this like Jamie's story?

I know in myself that I have been most thankful when I have been poorest and far from home. I have been thankful when I have been hurt and lying on the road and strangers have come to me and cared for me. But every day I eat better food than Solomon "in all his glory". I get to work in a church that is a place of hope and growth and change, to the envy of many of my colleagues. I live in a city, a province, a country so great that most of humanity can hardly imagine it. And each morning the sun rises over the eastern edge of the lake and I get to see it.

God doesn't scatter blessings on me. He dumps them by the cubic yard. And I notice. But I don't skid into base on my knees before his altar. I don't save every scrap and use it twice and treasure it always. I am grateful..... but I have forgotten about saying "thank you" to God.

And maybe this is true of you too.

So what is the work that we must begin to re-find our grateful hearts?

I think that, like the Yousef, I must learn to notice who is giving to me rather than just noticing the gift. I must notice God.

God is hard to notice, being invisible, ineffable, incomprehensible and so forth. So I must start watching for the effects of God's giving. I must notice the co-incidences. I must notice the wonder of fresh fruit in my hand, of gas pouring into my bike's tank, of water, clean and almost free, pouring out of my tap. I must be aware of having a wife and children who love me, and of people in this congregation who care about me. These are not "Givens" but "Gifts"

Noticing God behind these is not about building chains of causality, or denying them either. It is a different logic at work. It is about attributing to God the final "Thanks"

Thanks for a planet that works. Thanks for breath in my lungs. Thanks for that traffic light staying green. Thanks for my feet carrying me these thousands of miles. Thanks for putting me in the right place. Thanks for helping me in the work you have given me to do. Thanks for last night's rest. Thanks for surrounding me with good people, friends and family.

The work is to notice God in nearly everything. It is to look for God, maybe, like learning to look for Waldo in those puzzles. And then gradually beginning to recognize God in a bus driver's kindness, in the falling dance of an autumn leaf, and the warmth of hot tea in a cup. Noticing the Giver in the gift.

Then saying Thanks is the seal on the gift and the return of the love and it is the act of "praying all the time"

May this Harvest Thanksgiving be, for us, a chance to begin again to do the spiritual work of noticing the Giver and not just once a year, but every moment, living, like Jamie's children, and Yousef the healed, in an attitude of gratitude.