

Don't be a turkey

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I've been told that the commercially grown turkey is one of nature's less intelligent creatures. In the article I read, the domesticated turkey was described as being "as brainless as a baseball."

Even drinking can put a strain on turkey intelligence. If a turkey is outdoors, looking up at the sky when it starts to rain, it can drown. They're often not smart enough to close their mouths in the rain. Being called a turkey takes on a whole new connotation!

But at least the turkey has an excuse for being "bird-brained." It has a bird's brain! There is less excuse for human beings. Take the nine lepers Luke writes about in Luke 17. Jesus had given them a tremendous gift. Jesus had healed them from a disgusting, painful, and unsightly skin disease. Even more, Jesus had made it possible for them to re-enter society and reunite with their families. Ten lepers were healed. But only one leper, and a Samaritan at that, came back and said, "Thanks."

What turkeys! Ten received God's blessing, but only one stopped to say thanks. What about us? Thanksgiving Day is here. In which group will you be found? Amongst the nine who forgot or with the one who came back to thank God?

No one wants to be a turkey. If we want to avoid being "turkeys" this Thanksgiving, the behavior of that tenth leper might prove instructive. A first step in thanks-giving is perceiving, seeing the ways we've been blessed. God has given different creatures different ways of seeing. I read that a hawk, perched on top of the Empire State building, could locate a dime on the sidewalk below. I don't know why a hawk would care about a dime located on the sidewalk below the Empire State Building, but if a dime were there, the hawk could spot it. A bee has a different kind of vision. Its eyes have 15,000 facets that enable it to see the sun as a single dot and to navigate long distances with the sun as a reference. A kingfisher has two kinds of vision: one for spotting fish as it flies overhead and another for seeing fish underwater.

There are different ways of seeing, and we may need to see things in different ways if we are to experience the full measure of our blessings. Can we thank God this Thanksgiving not only for the good things that happened, but also for the bad things that didn't happen? The problems and disasters we worried about which did not come about?

Can we look in a different way and see some sort of blessing even in the problems that we do face? George Matheson, a Scottish preacher, once shared, "I've thanked God a thousand times for my 'roses.' Now I've got to learn to thank God for my 'thorns.'" Matheson happened to be blind — which is a pretty significant "thorn." Maybe, if we think about it a bit, we, too, can find different ways of seeing our blessings. And we are not meant to keep all of these blessings to ourselves. "Thanks," is only half of the word "Thanksgiving." "Giving" is the other half.

We are all very fortunate to have something to give. In the West Virginia hills they have a custom of setting an extra place setting and an extra chair at the Thanksgiving table. It's a reminder that there will always be people in need — and we need to make room in our hearts and in our giving for people in need.

We can make generous giving a part of our thanks-giving. Remember, every time we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick or the prisoner, it's the same thing as doing it for Jesus (Matthew 25:31). The tenth leper may not have had much, but in his gratitude he shared what he had to give.

This Thanksgiving, don't be a turkey. In English, the word "think" and the word "thank" both come from the same root. Nine out of ten forgot to think and forgot to thank God for their blessings. But the tenth leper saw his blessings, gave thanks for his blessings, and shared his blessings. So can we.