

### Thanks – living

*An attitude of gratitude comes from a heart transformed by God’s love and grace.*

.....**1 Thessalonians 5: 16 – 18** .....  
***“Be joyful always; <sup>17</sup>pray continually; <sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”***.....

My Dad got us started. Every Thanksgiving before the turkey was brought to the table, one by one, he would ask us what we were thankful for. In a kind of uncomfortable sharing, we would come up with our best reason to be thankful that year.

Most years, it was easy to be thankful; we had an overflowing of abundant blessings in our families and in our lives. But there were some years, I admit, I didn’t feel very thankful. I was either too exhausted getting ready for all the company, cleaning the house (and the bathrooms), or worn out from buying and preparing all the food. I was by a fairly accurate description, ‘grumpy.’ I was **definitely not** thankful.

And then came the years when cleaning the house and making the perfect lump-free mashed potatoes were the last things on my mind. Giving thanks was hard for far more serious reasons. Illness – cancer-, barged into our family, unwelcome and unwanted. But Dad always found reason to give thanks. Even in the midst of our family’s worst days, Dad was able to give thanks.

Maybe you can relate. I imagine that there have been years when you too have bristled at the idea of celebrating with thanksgiving. I also imagine that there are days when thanksgiving is not the first thing on your mind! In hard times, words of praise like we read this morning in our Call to Worship: *‘Give thanks to the LORD and praise His name, for the LORD is good and His love endures forever,’* grate painfully against your reality. Trying to be *‘glad’* when you are feeling *‘sad’* is so very hard to do.

I know the feeling too! Some days I catch myself wallowing in a pattern of discouragement, caught in a cycle of reciting all of my *‘have-nots.’* Unfortunately, and way too often, my *‘have-nots’* cancel out my *‘do-have’* blessings. Maybe you can relate.

I am so very grateful that God doesn’t leave me in my self-imposed sinkholes for very long. I truly know that God sends me His Holy Spirit to speak words of faith into my mind so that I am able to cry out to God: *‘Help me Lord; help me climb out of this pit. Lord! Help me get free of this gloom! Help me Lord! Give me back a thankful heart.’* And you know what? God always does.

One time, as I was praying this prayer, driving down Rt. 19 near South Hills Village Mall, an amazing flood of grace; a Spirit of gratitude, just washed through me. It was as if a curtain separating me from God’s hope had been lifted. I was filled with a sense of everything that I had to be thankful for; reason after reason bombarded me. I was filled to overflowing with thanksgiving. If only I would remember to pray like that more often!

As we begin a new Church year with Advent beginning next Sunday, I have made it a challenge and a goal for myself to establish a pattern of daily gratitude that I am calling *'thanks-living.'* Maybe you would like to join me in giving thanks in **all** things. As our reading from 1st Thessalonians today charges us to do... let's practice together to ***'continually give thanks to God in all circumstances.'***

The first thing I will resolve to do every morning is to say *'thank you'* to God. While it will be tempting for me to rehearse all the obligations I have for the day even before my feet hit the floor, I resolve to begin the day by first saying *'thank you'* to God. Are you with me?

I remember a saying one of our sons had written on a white board in his apartment. It said, *'Every day is a **bonus.**'* He said that he wanted that daily reminder. We do tend to take each new day for granted, don't we? But every day is, in fact, a gift from God.

Without a doubt this is the best way we too can approach each and every day. If there is any *'golden lining'* in the sadness that we experience in life, maybe it is that we are able to realize how fragile our days really are and take the opportunity to give thanks for what we **do** have.

Let's go back to Paul's words in our reading today. Did Paul say ***'give thanks FOR all things'?*** No. Paul said, ***'Give thanks IN all things; pray continually.'*** Paul knew suffering.

Remember what Paul and Silas did when they were beaten and shackled and thrown into jail? (*Acts 16:23-34*) They prayed. Not only did they pray, but they sang hymns of praise to God! They trusted that God was still at work in their lives. In fact, God used their circumstances to make believers out of the jailer and his entire family.

This coming Thursday we will be celebrating our National Day of Thanksgiving. In the midst of feasting and family it is easy to forget the reason for the Day. The Pilgrims also knew suffering.

What began as a journey of hope across the ocean must have sorely tested their faith in God's provision. They landed far off course in cold Massachusetts in winter. *Half* of them died that first winter of starvation, illness and exposure. Their first year's crops failed miserably. It is said that some days all that each person was given to eat were *five* kernels of corn.<sup>1</sup>

They had every reason to despair and lash out in anger at God. But they didn't. Instead of holding a Day of Mourning for all that they had lost, what did they do instead? They held a feast of Thanksgiving! They chose to give thanks to God that half of them had **not** died.

They made a deliberate decision to be thankful in the midst of their circumstances. They were determined to see God's blessings instead of despair. From the beginning of our Nation, God was the object of our Thanksgiving. -Not family, not world peace, not Aunt Sally's pumpkin pie, -God.

In 1789, George Washington first declared a National Day of Thanksgiving, and then, almost a century later, Abraham Lincoln, even though in the midst of The Civil War, also

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Marshall & David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory*, (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1977), 139.  
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proclaimed a National Day of Thanksgiving. He said, *"The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings ... which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, ... which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and even soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God... They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, ... to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a Day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, ... with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, ... fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union."*<sup>2</sup>

I'm sure we all also add our 'Amen!' to President Lincoln's prophetic prayer for our nation today, don't we? As we prepare to celebrate America's Thanksgiving, the Christian Church around the world on this Sunday is also celebrating a different sort of Thanksgiving.

In the first chapter of Colossians, we are reminded why it is on this **Christ the King Sunday**, we find our ultimate reason to be thankful to God.

.....**Colossians 1: 9 – 14**.....

***"...we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. <sup>10</sup>And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup>being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully <sup>12</sup>giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. <sup>13</sup>For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.***

When I hear these verses, I can't help but wonder if the Colossian Christians were also trapped in a pattern of grieving their 'have-nots?' I have to believe that Paul was writing to remind them to count all of their 'do haves.'

In these verses, Paul reminded them, and us, that with the birth of Jesus, an utterly amazing thing happened. God in human flesh came to live among humans. God sent His Son Jesus in order to invite us into His own eternal Kingdom. Jesus loved us enough that he died to secure our salvation. He sealed a new covenant between us and God in his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sin. Three days later, God showed that He had defeated the power of death

<sup>2</sup>[https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/transcript\\_for\\_abraham\\_lincoln\\_thanksgiving\\_proclamation\\_1863](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/transcript_for_abraham_lincoln_thanksgiving_proclamation_1863).  
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and raised Jesus from the grave. In his resurrection body Jesus lived among his friends for 40 days until God lifted him back into heaven (*Acts 1:3*).

Today through the spiritual legacy of Paul and earlier pilgrims in the faith, we are able to remind ourselves with great gratitude that as out of control our lives may appear to be, we have a Lord and Savior who loves us; he welcomes us in spite of our sin, and graciously opens the door of God's Kingdom to us. Jesus is blessing us right now at this moment by interceding for us, as he reigns at the right hand of God the Father.

I want to share with you a story of one family's choice to serve Jesus as King of their lives with gratitude in the midst of the most horrendous circumstances. Corrie ten Boom's family chose to risk their own lives to shelter Jewish families in their home during the Nazi Occupation of the Netherlands.

Eventually they were discovered, and even though they were Christians, they were taken to the concentration camps along with the Jews. Corrie and her sister Betsie, together with other women prisoners, were put in a barrack that was infested with fleas.

When Betsie would offer prayers of thanks every day, Corrie said that she could not give thanks for the fleas. Betsie reminded her that because of the fleas, the guards didn't come to harass them and instead stayed away.

Corrie was miraculously released from prison, but her father and sister died there. She continued her life as an evangelist for her king, Jesus. She wrote this poem as a testament of gratitude to him, even through her suffering and sadness. While I read this poem, I want to show you a tapestry Corrie used in her talks about faith in Jesus.

**Life is But a Weaving** (The Tapestry Poem) by Corrie Ten Boom

*My life is but a weaving, Between my God and me.*

*I cannot choose the colors, He weaveth steadily.*

*Oft' times He weaveth sorrow, And I in foolish pride*

*Forget He sees the upper, And I the underside. (slide )*

*Not 'til the loom is silent, And the shuttles cease to fly*

*Will God unroll the canvas, And reveal the reason why. (slide )*

*The dark threads are as needful, In the weaver's skillful hand*

*As the threads of gold and silver, In the pattern He has planned*

*He knows, He loves, He cares; Nothing this truth can dim.*

*He gives the very best to those, Who leave the choice to Him.*

This Thanksgiving, be blessed by knowing and trusting, like Corrie, that your life is a 'weaving' between God and you. Practice 'Thanks-living', because 'God knows, God loves, and God cares' about you.

***"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*** You are safe now and into eternity in the care of your King. Amen.