

November 11, 2018
Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Celebration Sunday
Dedication of Participation Cards
Veterans Day

First Presbyterian Church
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Appreciative Expression

I Thessalonians 5: 16-24

Paul lifts up three distinct Christian virtues: "Rejoice always....pray constantly....give thanks in all circumstances...".

Three forms of appreciative expression

I Thessalonians 5: 16-24

[16] Rejoice always, [17] pray constantly, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. [19] Do not quench the Spirit, [20] do not despise prophesying, [21] but test everything; hold fast what is good, [22] abstain from every form of evil. [23] May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24] He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Prayer for illumination

Cast your light upon these ancient words of Holy Scripture, words written in an age so like and unlike ours to people so like and unlike us. As these words shaped the faithful of Thessalonica, as they have shaped so many lives over the intervening ages, may they now shape our lives. Amen.

APPRECIATIVE EXPRESSION

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul, whose own life had been utterly transformed by faith in Jesus, has been sailing and hiking around the Mediterranean world, telling all who will hear the story that has so altered his life. One of the places he visits is Thessalonica in northern Greece. There he founded a fledgling congregation. Months, perhaps a few years later, he writes them this first letter, a letter of affectionate encouragement. The days between his visit and the letter had not been easy. As a young church there were a few doctrinal misunderstandings that needed to be dealt with. They were facing confusion from within and persecution from without. Paul has been mercilessly criticized; life for this fledgling congregation had become fragile at best.

These words of Paul are among the first Christian words ever put to paper. The two letters to the Thessalonians were written decades before the four Gospels were finished – likely around the year 52 AD. The word “Christian” had probably not yet been invented. The letters were written less than a generation after the death and resurrection of Jesus. They are in fact “primal” Christian words – words to bolster the faith; encourage and provide perspective.

PERSPECTIVE

Let me tell you about another letter that prompted a sense of perspective. A young lady wrote a letter home from college, It reads:

"Dear Mom: Sorry I haven't written sooner, but my arm has been broken. I broke it, and my left leg, when I jumped from the second floor of my dormitory...you see my dorm room was on fire. We were lucky because a young tattoo parlor worker saw the blaze and called the Fire Department. They were there in minutes. I was in the hospital for a few days and Paul, the tattoo parlor worker, came to see me every day. And because it was taking so long to get our dormitory in livable conditions again, I decided to move in with Paul. He has been so nice. I just recently discovered that I am pregnant. But, don't worry, Paul and I plan to get married just as soon as he can get a divorce from his wife. I hope things are fine at home. I'm doing fine, and will write more when I get the chance. Love,

Your daughter, Susie

P.S. None of the above is true. I just wanted you to have the "Proper Perspective!" because I did get a "D" in English and a "D" in Chemistry.

It's all a matter of perspective. Like looking at a glass half empty or half full, it's a matter of perspective. Just like there is more than one side to every story, allegation or insinuation – It's a matter of perspective.

Beloved as these words of scripture are, they contain one very jolting verse. Verse eighteen. It is an injunction that has become so familiar we no longer hear how impossible it sounds. “Give thanks in all circumstances...” Paul exacts a radical appreciative expression. After news of two recent despicable mass shootings, wildfires wiping out entire communities in the west, Many of you will have no trouble imagining days when giving thanks would seem incongruous at best.

You are downsized or lose your job. Give thanks in *all* circumstances, Paul?

The market cuts your net worth in half in an instant. Give thanks in *all* circumstances, Paul?

The specialist tells you your child has a learning problem. Give thanks in *all* circumstances, Paul?

You're in the midst of a nasty divorce. Give thanks in *all* circumstances, Paul?

You get a fearsome diagnosis. Give thanks in *all* circumstances, Paul?

Your aging parents are in and out of hospitals, dreading the nursing home. Give thanks in *all* circumstances, Paul?

You lose your life partner. Give thanks in *all* circumstances, Paul?

You witness natural disasters or tragedies that take the lives of thousands of people? Give thanks in *all* circumstances, Paul?

Paul is saying to be thankful **in** all circumstances and not **for** all circumstances. No we are not to be thankful that someone got sick or that someone passed away, but we are to continue to show our thankfulness in all circumstances, especially in the difficult times.

In my limited experience, I have observed that there are basically two kinds of people in this world. More accurately, you and I are always being pulled between two radically different perspectives *thankfulness or entitlement*.

Entitlement is the sense that we deserve and have some sort of endowed right to what we have. There are those, on the other hand, who live life as a gift. When we remember that, at the end of the day, it's not all ours by right, that it's all a gift; then it *is* possible, not easy, but *possible* to actually give thanks in every circumstance,

John Canuso

A man named John Canuso made a deal with God when his nine-year-old daughter, Babe, was diagnosed with leukemia, and as he knelt at her bed, he swore: "Help see my daughter through and, I'll dedicate my life." Babe is alive and well, married and a Mom—something she thought would never happen after all the radiation and chemotherapy.

John kept his promise. John was a builder by trade. In 1974, the year his daughter became ill, he reached into his own pocket to renovate and furnish a rundown Philadelphia home that became the first Ronald McDonald House, a place where families could stay while their youngsters were being treated at Children's Hospital. John said, "Thank you, Lord. I'm glad you asked me to do something in my profession." Helping others was John's way of saying "thank you."

Herein lies the ability to sense God in the midst of all that happens to us in life, even when we are hurting and sad. Even when the sledding is tough. It is knowing that God does not abandon us to our pain. Or to put it in other words, "contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want, but the realization of how much you already have."

A poet wrote,

Thank God for dirty dishes;
They have a tale to tell.
While other folks go hungry,
We're eating pretty well.

With home, and health, and happiness,
We shouldn't want to fuss;
For by this stack of evidence,
God's been very good to us.

Thank God

- For the taxes that you pay because it means you are employed.
- For the parking spot you find at the end of the parking lot because it means you are capable of walking and have been blessed with transportation.
- For utility bills because that means you enjoy creature comforts.
- For the pile of laundry and ironing, because it means you have clothing to wear.
- For the person seated near you in church that sings off key, because it means you can hear.
- For the lawn that needs mowing, leaves that need raking, windows that need cleaning, gutters that need fixing because it means you have a home.
- For aching muscles and weariness at the end of day, because it means you are capable of working hard.
- For the alarm that goes off all too early in the morning, because it means you are alive.

Thank God

- For the touch of your beloved's hand
- For a grandchild's squeal of delight and a grandparent's glee at hearing it.
- For the beauty of the earth.
- For the bright moon and sky full of stars.
- For a bite of fresh fruit, or fresh baked bread.
- For the aromas of home and hearth.
- For the blessing of sleep at the end of the day.
- For all gifts unearned, undeserved...

For the grace of God

For the Gift Christ

For the ministry of this church that seeks to faithfully extend it.

Therein lies a life line through even the most perilous of conditions...Here we find the heart and soul of authentic appreciative expression. May it be so. Amen