

Psalm 100
Luke 17:11-19
Gratitude Sunday

23rd Sunday After Pentecost
Midway Presbyterian Church
November 5, 2023
Communion

The Grace of a Grateful Heart

Introduction to the Psalm

Our Psalm today is an invitation to enter joyfully into God's presence with praise and thanksgiving. Listen to these words from Psalm 100...

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson

Our Gospel Lesson is the familiar story of Jesus healing ten men with leprosy, but only one thanking him—and he a foreigner. Listen to these words from Luke 17:11-19...

Sermon

The pilgrims who came to this land nearly 400 years ago chose to set aside a special day for Thanksgiving. This decision came during the second winter that the Plymouth Colonists spent in the New World. That first dreadful winter in Massachusetts had killed nearly half the colony. But in 1621, along with the harvest of corn, new hope had been gleaned. And Governor William Bradford decreed that December 13th be set aside for prayer and feasting to show gratitude to God.

Their celebration reveals much about these courageous people. The women spent many days preparing food—baking, and roasting. The children turned roasts on spits over open fires. Some eighty friendly Indians came to the feast, bringing with them wild turkey and venison. Tables were set outdoors, and like one big family, the Colonists and the Indians participated in a time of gladness, gratitude, and good will. This went on for three days and was the First Thanksgiving in America; no doubt a blessing to all.

How many of our present-day problems might be solved if we developed the grace of a grateful heart. Husbands and wives...parents and children...churches...schools...our country. When was the last time you wrote a thank you note to someone or told someone how much you appreciated something, rather than taking it for granted? Receiving a thank you note warms our hearts and brightens our day.

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said:

We pray for the big things and forget to give thanks for the ordinary, small (and yet really not small) gifts. How can God entrust great things to one who will not thankfully receive from him the little things?

In a newspaper column Jeff Herring said:

There will always be people with more than us and people with less than us. If we focus on those who have less than us, we are in danger of becoming complacent. If we focus on those who have more than us, we are in danger of becoming envious.

Read what author and parent educator Stephen Glenn has to say about abundance: “In terms of the population of the world, you have abundance if—when you get up in the morning—you have a choice of what to eat, a choice of what to wear, a job to go to and a way to get there.”

Kind of puts things in perspective, doesn't it?

Author Walter B. Knight tells about the sinking of the Scottish trawler, the *Theresa Boyle*, by Nazi bombers in the North Sea during World War II. The ship went down so quickly that the small crew barely escaped with their lives. It was a bitterly cold February day and, because of the cold and fatigue, one by one the crew members fell back exhausted, unable to help with the rowing. After they had been in the freezing elements for more than fifty hours, they had all but given up hope of being rescued, when suddenly they heard the droning engines of an airplane in the distance. The plane made a low pass over the lifeboat and then headed off fifteen miles away to guide two minesweepers back to the boat. The plane then circled above until the entire crew had been rescued. Seeing its work was done,

it flew away, and had gone about two miles when one of the rescue ships called the plane back. The pilot asked if anything was wrong and the minesweeper signaled that everything was all right and that the survivors, like the one leper in Luke 17, simply wanted to say, “Thank you!”

The writer of the 100th Psalm had found a place of thanksgiving. Any place is an appropriate place to give thanks, but there is a special place that has been provided—namely, the house of God:

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him, bless his name!

For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures for ever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

How good it is that we gather here today as the family of God, a community come together to give thanks to God for his goodness, his faithfulness, his love, his marvelous works, for the blessings of this past year. And one way we can do that is by pledging a part of our financial resources, as well as our time and talents, to the work and worship of Christ’s Church. So that we can keep the lights and air on. So that we can care for our building and grounds. So that we can pay our staff and support ministries such as Good Neighbor Cupboard and Meals on Wheels, as well as our missionaries.

As we celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper today, it’s worth noting that the word *sacrament* is from the Latin *sacramentum*. And the *sacramentum militare* was a vow or pledge of loyalty to the emperor. Just as we pledge our loyalty to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Dr. A. J. Cronin was a British doctor who gave up the practice of medicine to write novels. Once he told about a physician of his acquaintance who prescribed a “thank-you cure” for frustrated and emotionally disturbed patients. When a defeated patient came to the good doctor and he could find nothing wrong physically, he would prescribe for the patient to say “thank you” for six weeks when anyone did a favor or showed a kindness. And according to Cronin, the physician had a good rate of cure. Finding a way to express thanksgiving helped to put these people on the road to recovery and well-being. A grateful heart can nurture health in us as well.

American author Fulton Oursler, a former writer and editor of *Reader's Digest*, was born in Baltimore in 1893 and died in 1952. Oursler once told a personal story about a nurse named Anna who took care of him when he was young. He said that he remembered as a little boy seeing Anna, sitting at the kitchen table with her hands folded on her starched, white apron, looking up to heaven and praying, “Much obliged, Lord, for my vittles.” When he asked Anna what vittles were, she said that vittles were what we had to eat and drink. Young Fulton told Anna that she would get her food whether or not she was thankful, and old Anna replied, “Sure, we’ll get our vittles, but it just makes ’m taste better when [we’re] thankful.” Amen? Amen!

Oursler said Anna told him that her old preacher had taught her as a little girl to be thankful. He had told her to *look* for things for which to be grateful. Anna added that when she awaked in the morning, she would lie there “wondering what I’ve got to be thankful for. Then the smell of freshly perked coffee floats up the stairs and I know I have something for which to be thankful. So, I begin my day with, ‘Much obliged, Lord, for the coffee...and much obliged, too, for the smell of it.’ ”

Well, the years passed, and Oursler grew up and left home. And one day he received a message that Anna was very sick and couldn't live much longer. Wanting to see his dear nurse one more time, he traveled back to the old home place, and when he walked into her bedroom, he noticed her hands were folded over the white sheets just as he had seen them folded on her white apron so many times before when she was praying. Ousler said that across the years he had become skeptical of God and spiritual things, and he wondered as he looked at Anna what she had to be thankful for at a time like this. Then, as Anna opened her eyes and looked around the room and saw so many of her longtime friends, she closed her eyes and said with a smile, "Much obliged, Lord, for such fine friends."

The grace of a grateful heart. Only grateful Christians grow in the understanding of God's grace. One traditional mealtime prayer asks, "Lord, make us grateful for this and all your bounty." "Make us grateful." Perhaps that is the heart of the matter; God provides not only the food but also the grateful heart. If so, then gratitude is a grace in the true sense of the word—a gift of God.

My friends, let us pray for and open ourselves to the gift and the grace of a grateful heart. Let us nurture within us the grace of a grateful heart. Doing so will bring blessings, not only to us, but to others as well. Thanksgiving will be more than just a day, but a yearlong way of life.

As Paul said to the church in Philippi:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7)

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.