



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for November 24, 2019

“Our Grateful Response: Living
Thankfully”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Luke 17:11-19

Devotional with the Grandkids

When the grandkids are over to spend the night we wrap up the evening by reading from a children’s devotional book entitled, *My Little Words Devotional*.

I will ask the kids which one they want to read and they will always point to the one on thankfulness.

I am proud of them for picking that one out. It is always good to be thankful.

On thankfulness, the devotional puts it this way, *“Being thankful means remembering your blessings and saying, ‘Wow! Thank you, God!’ God wants us to be thankful for all He does for us and all He gives to us, like friends and family and bunnies and berries. What are you thankful for?”*

We’d do well to ponder that same question.

We Don’t Say Thanks Enough

We don’t say thanks enough. It’s one of those words that are quick to get lost in shuffle.

Even though we have every reason to be thankful, we are slow to express our appreciation.

A little boy had been studying Spanish in school. He had worked hard and was proud of his progress. He wanted to show off a bit, so he said to his father, *“Guess what? I can say please and thank you in Spanish.”*

“That’s great,” replied his father, *“but how come you never say it in English?”*

“Please” and *“thank you”* are some of the earliest words we learn to say, yet as we grow older we use them less and less.

The *“thank you”* note is a somewhat lost art these days. Nothing thrills the soul like receiving a thank you note.

Giving thanks gives us pause to consider those persons that have helped us along life's way. Giving thanks does the heart good. It gives us pause to consider the great blessings of life. Giving thanks lead us to consider just how dependent we are upon one another. Giving thanks leads us to consider just how dependent we are upon God.

We are slow to give thanks and because of that we are apt to miss the good things God is doing in our lives.

The devotional *Jesus Calling* has this to say about such things, "*A thankful attitude opens windows of heaven where spiritual blessings fall freely down.*"

The Healing of Ten Lepers

I've always been challenged by the story of Jesus healing the ten lepers in Luke chapter 17. I see myself there, just as I am sure you do as well.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem traveling along the border between Galilee and Samaria when a group of ten lepers approached.

Leprosy was a particularly cruel disease. You suffered not only physically, but emotionally.

Lepers were segregated from the rest of society. They were the "*unclean.*" They were required to keep themselves a safe distance away. The isolation they experienced was excruciating. In reality, it was worse than the disease itself.

The ten who approached Jesus that day all had the same disease. Racial and religious barriers were non-existent as the ten stood on the common ground of their illness.

The fact that the ten were together wasn't "*a misery loved company*" thing, they were just wanted to be healed.

At a distance they exclaimed, "*Have pity on us.*"

Immediately, Jesus ordered them to go and present themselves to the priests. And as they went they were healed.

I can't begin to imagine what they must have felt. They had to be overwhelmed. Their lives would be forever different. That's the way it is when we come in contact with the wonderworking power of Christ.

Only One Returned to Give Thanks

The curious thing about this story is that only one of the ten returned to offer their appreciation. It would seem that the others would have come back to have at least said thanks.

A lousy 10 percent giving thanks is a terribly poor showing. It is though not too far off the mark when it comes to giving thanks today. Like the nine who didn't return to give thanks, we too are slow to give thanks as well.

Our attention is much too focused on ourselves to even notice the wonderful things God is doing all the time all around us.

In their defense, the nine who failed to return were only doing what the Lord had asked them to do.

While obedience is a good thing, it should never come at the expense of a thankful heart. Otherwise, our good intentions will in short order become nothing more than a matter of drudgery.

Obedience, if anything, should be an expression of love, a grateful response, if you will, to the good things God is doing in our lives.

Hear a bit more from that the devotional, *Jesus Calling*, "*Thankfulness is not some sort of magic formula; it is the language of love, which enables you to communicate intimately with me.*"

Nothing pleases God more than a thankful heart.

A New Leaf on Life

What was it about the man who returned to give thanks? And more to the point, what was it about those who didn't?

Those who failed to give thanks, quite possibly, thought they deserved what they got, almost as a divine rite. They most certainly took things for granted.

They were more bent toward selfishness and because of that lost sight of the very one who had helped them.

That's where the One man who returned to give thanks was starkly different.

He recognized the One who was the very source of his new leaf on life.

The man had been given a new start, a new start that was his heart's desire for a long time. And because this man had been given a new start, his focus was now less on himself and a lot more on Jesus, the One who made it all possible.

Christ makes all things new.

Paul puts it well when he writes, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ that person is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!*" (II Corinthians 5:17)

Focused Upon the Source of Every Blessing

The great thing about this special season of the year is that our focus, if but for a fleeting time, is on the source of our every blessing.

Abraham Lincoln's great Thanksgiving Day Proclamation on October 3, 1863 notes all sorts of blessings, in spite of the Civil War that raged.

"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."

James 1:17 states, *"All good and perfect gifts are from above."*

When we recognize that our gaze is upon God. We recognize him for who he is and notice what he is doing. And because of that, we can't help but be thankful.

If though, on Thanksgiving, our interests more with turkey and dressing, with the Dallas Cowboys and the Detroit Lions, or with the sometimes impossible task of getting from one place to another, we miss a grand opportunity of connecting with God.

If though, we do ponder the greatness of God and what he is doing in our lives, we will find ourselves giving thanks just like the man who returned to Jesus to give thanks.

Christ deserves *Our Grateful Response*.

Living Thankfully

And so, if we can be thankful on Thanksgiving Day maybe, just maybe, we can do it the remaining 364 days of the year.

It is then that Thanksgiving will cease being relegated to the fourth Thursday in November and will become a matter of ***Living Thankfully*** the whole year long.

If you:

- Have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world.
- Have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish, you are among the top 8% of the wealthiest people in the world.

- Woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the many who will not even survive the day.
- Have never experienced the fear of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 700 million in the world.

The fact that you can attend this church service today without the fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are envied by and more blessed than three billion others.

We have every reason to be counted among the 10% who are thankful 100% of the time.

The Strange Irony

The strange irony regarding those in that vast majority who don't share the same blessings as we do is that they seem to be so much more **joyous** than we are.

They seem to be so much more **faithful**, even in the midst of their hardship. Their faithfulness leads them to thankfulness, even though they have so very little.

They are the ones, not us, more apt to be **thankful**. We can certainly learn from their example.

A 3 x 5 Card Exercise

Psalm 103:2 reminds us, *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."*

In remembering those benefits and the One who gives them, we can't help but be thankful, which in the end is the very place the Lord wants us to be.

I've been to many a meeting where I felt as though the whole thing could have been printed on a 3 x 5 card and simply mailed out. I hope that's not how you feel about today.

For me, the 3 x 5 card is an important tool in helping me to stay focused. What I write on a 3 x 5 card, in time, usually gets accomplished. What I write I on a 3 x 5 card, I usually end up remembering.

This morning you will notice a simple 3 x 5 card in your bulletin. Last week we filled out a card of a different sort. The one today might very well be the most important one of all.

I want to ask you to write a few things you're thankful for. It might be a family member, a friend, a good word you recently received about your health, or a bit of good news regarding your job.

Whatever it is, write it down. Let God's Spirit bring to light those things you need to be thankful for.

Upon making your list, let me ask you to offer thanks to God. Return to him the *Grateful Response* that is due him.

Count yourself among the 10% who offers thanks 100% of the time.

Let's use this time constructively and may our hearts be filled with thanksgiving.