



SERMONS

Thanksgiving Eve

Attitude or Platitude of Gratitude

Philippians 4:4-7

November 25, 2020

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My sermon title for this Thanksgiving Eve is, "Attitude or Platitude of Gratitude." I want to share MY attitude of gratitude for our wonderful 2020 gift. (Invite Deb/Cooper forward) She is beautiful, extraordinary, brilliant, adorable...and we love having her in our family. Here name is Debora...Deb Toone. Cooper's wife. AND...they have presented us with our NEXT wonderful 2020 gift: the beautiful, extraordinary, brilliant and adorable Cecilia Grace; Cici.

Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday. I love four days in a row, I love earth-tone colored food, I love being with family. But I also love Thanksgiving because it is the most enduringly Christian of them all. This Sunday, we kick off the Christmas season called Advent. But any glance at the TV will tell you, "Christmas" is like the "Lord Voldemort" of holidays: the one which "shall not be named." Christmas is now the "holiday season," Christmas trees are "holiday trees"...Christmas carols are, I suppose, holiday carols. Christmas has been co-opted by retailers. As for Easter, it has been homogenized. Bunnies, chocolate, pretty dresses, and annual trek to church...if church is open.

Our two epic Christian holidays have been de-spiritualized by our culture. But not Thanks-giving. Because at its core, Thanksgiving is spiritual. "Thanksgiving" requires an object...a person to whom thanks is given. It is nonsensical to say "I am thankful" ...without having someone to whom that thanks is offered. I cannot be thankful all by myself. To say I am thankful without acknowledging someone who deserves my



thanks is really just a fancy way of saying, "I like my life, my family, my friends, my house, and vacations and all the other stuff I have accumulated. Isn't it swell?"

Thanksgiving is the most spiritually subversive of religious holidays. Because the moment you pause at your table to say what they are thankful for ... that is an act of worship. Because you are declaring that everything that matters to you is, in fact, a gift. A gift FROM someone. Someone outside that table. Someone...out there...somewhere.

Thanksgiving is the most subversive holiday...and I love it. Because the killjoy, politically correct, holiday gestapo has still not figured out what to do with this one. The very name, "Thanksgiving," declares, "Everything I have is a gift to me...and I am going to acknowledge my Gift-giver...whoever he might be."

Of course, we gathered here...and those who have taken a break from preparing Grandma's notoriously touchy dinner rolls to watch on line...we know who to thank. The Lord God of the universe...is the giver of all good gifts...and supremely, the gift of his Son, Jesus. That is why Paul can't help himself when, in the middle of II Corinthians 9, he breaks out with a shout of praise: "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"

Thanksgiving...it is an essential Christian act...and I have several texts I want to share...just to remind us of the predominance of thanksgiving as a theme throughout the New Testament:

Col 3: 15-17 And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

I Thess 5:16-19. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.



Eph 5.20 "...be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Phil 4: 4-8. "...The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. THIS IS THE WORD, ETC.

"...be thankful," Paul tells the Colossians. And he expands on this with the Thessalonians: "...give thanks IN ALL circumstances." That's a little more challenging, but still doable. Regardless of what we are encountering...Paul says...in the midst of that, you can still find something for which to give thanks. That's been true...even in 2020, right?

But then, to the Ephesians, Paul doubles down. "...giving thanks ALWAYS and FOR EVERYTHING..." Now...that's harder. Not just occasionally and IN every circumstance. Now he says that we ought to thank God "ALWAYS and FOR EVERYTHING."

And this is just a smattering from throughout scripture. The Pentateuch...the psalms...the prophets...the gospels...are full of examples of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is an essential act of Christian worship. Whatever your circumstance, whatever your year has been like, whether healthy or ill, joyful or sad, rich or poor, surrounded with love or lonely...the words that ought ALWAYS be on our lips...are, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you....THANK YOU Lord!"

Thanksgiving is important when our hearts are full and things are going well...because we want to remember that those blessed moments are a gift from God. We never want to take them for granted. I am blessed with a wife who takes extraordinarily good care of me. Without comment, without complaint, for all our lives together, she has cooked, cleaned, cared for the children...and cared for me, prayed for me, counseled me. I walk in tired to the smell of a lovingly prepared meal in a clean home...day after day after day. And one of my frequent practices (you may ask her if this is so...she'll back me up!) is to come up behind Cyndi in the kitchen, wrap my arms around her, nuzzle her neck and say: "I NEVER take you for granted."



Because I never do. I never want to. I never want her to feel taken for granted. I have tried to maintain a persistent attitude of gratitude towards a woman who provides such loving care for me.

How much more ought that be our approach to God? To never take for granted the one who has given us every good thing...he who is the source of bounty and blessing, love and life...he who loved us enough to send his son...how much more does God deserve a heartfelt, unending drumbeat of gratitude from us...for all that is so good?

But what about when things are bad? What about a year like 2020, an unremitting stream of bad news? Pandemic. Economic unrest. Unemployment. Rising rates of depression, suicide, substance abuse. Racism, violence in the home, violence in the streets. Political turmoil. Seething enmity between parties and people of different parties. Even divisions about worship and what ought and ought not be allowed in the worship of God. We've all gone through hard patches. But I would say this has been the longest and hardest hard patch I've lived through. Perhaps you feel the same.

If ever there was a year that stirred anxiety, anger, uncertainty, fear...this was that year. So...what is the place of thanksgiving in a year like 2020? Well, Paul touches on it in Philippians. Remember, Paul was writing from jail where he was awaiting execution. He had PLENTY to be anxious about. But look at his antidote to fear and depression:

"... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplicationlet your requests be made known to God."

"Don't be anxious," Paul says. "Instead...pray! Put it all in God's hands. Trust in the Lord." Is that what he says?

Well...almost. The verse as I just read it would make sense. But I left something out. Did you notice? An important two-word phrase. "... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication ...WITH THANKSGIVINGlet your requests be made known to God."



Paul could have said that the way we combat anxiety is to pray about it; give it up to God; ask him to end our suffering and make things better and give us peace. But Paul can't help himself. He slips in a two-word phrase. In the Greek, it is "*meta eucharistias*" ... "with thanksgiving". You might have forgotten that the word "Eucharist" ... which we sometimes use for the Lord's Supper ... means "thanksgiving." How ironic that the word used for the meal where Jesus commemorates his suffering and death on the cross; on the evening when he was betrayed and arrested ... how ironic that such a memorial would be called "Eucharist." "Thanksgiving."

There is a powerful spiritual tip in these two words: During times that are harder than usual ... times when it is easy to stew and whine about the things that are wrong and hard ... during those times ... **ESPECIALLY** ... our prayers **OUGHT** to be filled with Eucharist. Thanksgiving!

I have found this to be so true in my life. Nothing washes away the deadening forces of despair or depression better than a flood of thanksgiving. In my darkest moments ... in those times when I have been most depressed or discouraged ... I have literally and intentionally abandoned other forms of prayer. I stopped confessing. I stopped praising. I stopped asking. Instead ... I just thanked God. And thanked. And thanked. I can remember seasons in my life where, on purpose, all I did was kneel down and name every good thing in my life I could think of ... an endless list ... and thank God for all of them. All I did was pray Eucharist.

On this Eve of Thanksgiving in a very hard year ... I challenge you ... to do this. To pray prayers of Eucharist until you run out ... or become exhausted. Tomorrow, when you gather around the feast, rather than asking each person to name **ONE** thing for which they are thankful ... ask them to name **TEN** things. Astound each other with the long list of God's faithful and gracious acts toward you.

This is the difference between an attitude and a platitude of gratitude. A platitude means a head nod ... a statement about something that is good or moral but that has been used too often to be meaningful or thoughtful. 'Yeah ... I'm grateful.' Bleh! If ever there was a moment to offer heartfelt, meaningful, deeply-pondered words of



thanksgiving to God...and as a witness to one another...it is now. And what better way to do so...than to return to the Lord's Table and celebrate "Eucharist."