**Sermon 8/4/19**

**Colossians 3:1-17**

Sheila collected the mail from her mailbox.

As she looked through the stack of bills and advertisements,

          she found a note from her friend Mavis.

Opening the card she read:

         "Come for a Thanksgiving dinner on Saturday, March 20th.

        No, we are not celebrating an early Thanksgiving.

        We are thanking God that all is well with Jason

                      after finally completing a battery of hospital tests.

What appeared to be very serious, has been found to be minor,

           corrected by medications."

Sheila called Mavis to accept the invitation and to chat about Thanksgiving in March.

Her cousin happily explained: "In our family, we sometimes have

           as many as ten thanksgivings in one year.

They mark happy events for which there are no formal celebration dates:

           a job promotion, a graduate degree, a good medical report.

Sometimes we celebrate with a dinner party, sometimes with a picnic or outing,

          but always with as many family members and friends who can come."

Ten Thanksgivings a year, can you imagine?

And yet in his letter to the Colossians Paul wrote: "Whatever you do,

          whether in word or deed, give thanks to God the Father through Jesus Christ."

Ten Thanksgivings a year would not be nearly enough if we followed Paul's advice.

In whatever we do, every day, we should be thanking God.

As people of God we ought to be known as "The Thankful People".

We should be overflowing with thankfulness,

           always giving thanks to God the Father for everything,

           we Christians should be known as a thankful and grateful people.

It doesn't really matter what the results may be in the lives of those around us,

                 God invites us to be people of thanksgiving.

We may not be able to alter the behavior of others by our gratitude,

               but our thanksgiving will still have a powerful benefit in our lives.

Paul urged the Colossians, and through his letters, all of us:

           "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,

           And be thankful, have gratitude in your hearts."

As we thank God, we discover his peace, and love, and joy.

As we recognize and appreciate all God has given to us, and does for us,

           our thanks will change us.

Benjamin Weir, a Missionary, was held hostage in Lebanon,

           and imprisoned under miserable conditions for 16 months.

In his first interview after his release,

           he was asked how he spent his time,

           and how he dealt with the boredom and despair.

His answer stunned the reporters.

He simply said, "By counting my blessings."

"Blessings?" the shocked reporters asked.

         “What blessings could you find in such miserable circumstances?”

Benjamin quietly explained:

          "Some days I got to take a shower.

           Sometimes there were some vegetables in my food.

          And I could always be thankful for the love of my family."

Benjamin Weir discovered the power to overcome his circumstances

           by learning to be thankful regardless of what his captors did.

He was physically in bondage, but spiritually and mentally he was free.

Why? How? Because he had learned to give thanks to the Father,

           even in the harshest of circumstances.

He told the reporters:

           "Every day, before I went to sleep, I searched for something to be thankful for.

           Sometimes finding a blessing in my circumstances was difficult,

                      but I did not go to sleep without thanking God for something.

          At first it was hard, but the more I thanked God,

                         the more I found to be grateful about."

The more we focus our hearts and minds on heavenly things,

          rather than earthly things, the closer we come to God.

We experience his presence, his love, his caring.

As we practice the presence of God, we become better at caring for and about, others.

The congregation of an inner-city church in Chicago

             constantly tries to demonstrate real faith and grace.

One Sunday, Adolphus, a young black man with a wild, angry look in his eye,

            began to worship each week at this congregation.

Every inner-city church has at least one "Adolphus".

How each congregation treats their "Adolphus"

           reveals much about their faith and trust in God,

           and their compassion, kindness, patience, and gentleness.

Adolphus had spent some time in Vietnam, and most likely his troubles started there.

He could never hold a job for long.

His fits of rage and craziness sometimes landed him in an asylum.

If Adolphus took his medication on Sunday, he was manageable.

Otherwise, well, church could be even more exciting than usual.

He might start at the back, and high-hurdle his way over the pews down to the altar.

He might raise his hands in the air during a hymn and make obscene gestures.

Or he might wear headphones and tune in bebop music instead of the sermon.

As part of worship, this congregation had a time called "Prayers of the People."

They would all stand as they were able, and spontaneously various people

             would call out a prayer for peace in the world,

             for healing of the sick,

            for justice in the community around them.

            or for any need they saw.

After each spoken request the people would respond in unison:

            “Lord, hear our prayer.”

Adolphus soon figured out that "Prayers of the People"

             provided an ideal platform for him to air his concerns.

One morning he prayed:

             “Lord, thank you for creating Whitney Houston and her magnificent body!"

After a puzzled pause, a few chimed in weakly, "Lord, hear our prayer.”

Then before anyone could beat him to it, Adolphus prayed:

            "Lord, thank you for the big recording contract I signed last week,

            and for all the good things happening to my band!"

Many who knew Adolphus, realized he was fantasizing,

           but they joined in with a heartfelt, "Lord, hear our prayer."

Several people in the church got together and took on Adolphus as a special project.

Every time he had an outburst, they pulled him aside and talked it through,

           calming him down.

It was discovered Adolphus sometimes walked the five miles to church

               on Sunday because he could not afford bus fare.

Members of the congregation began to offer him rides.

Some invited him over for meals.

Boasting about his musical talent, Adolphus asked to join the music group

            which sang during Communion services.

After hearing him audition, the leader settled on a compromise:

           Adolphus could stand with the others and sing,

           but only if his electric guitar remained unplugged.

Each time the group performed thereafter, Adolphus stood with them and sang

          and played his guitar, which, thankfully, produced no sound.

Against all odds, Adolphus's story has a happy ending.

He calmed down.

He started calling people in the church when he felt the craziness coming on.

In his entire life, no one had ever invested that kind of energy and concern in him.

He had no family, he had no job, he had no stability.

Church became for him the one stable place.

It accepted him despite all he had done to earn rejection.

It gave him a second chance, and a third, and a fourth…….

Christians who had experienced God's grace simply transferred it to Adolphus.

They looked up to Jesus, and followed in his footsteps.

Their gratitude for all God had done for them,

           and their compassion for one troubled young man, made all the difference.

It is amazing what can happen when:

          whatever we do, whether in word or deed,

          we do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,

          giving thanks to God the Father through him.

AMEN