

## “The Attitude of Gratitude”

**Date:** November 19, 2017      **Place:** Lakewood UMC      **Theme:** Thanksgiving  
**Texts:** Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Luke 17:11-17      **Occasion:** Thanksgiving Sunday

Before I begin I have a couple of jokes to share with you this morning. “What kind of music did the Pilgrims like?” – *Plymouth Rock*. Ok, “What happened when the turkey got into a fight?” – *He got the stuffing knocked out of him*. No? “If the Pilgrims were alive today, what would they be most famous for?” – *Their AGE!* How about this one? “What do you say when the pastor stops telling these jokes?” – *Thank God!*

That’s exactly what I want to talk about today, thanking God. This coming Thursday is the national holiday of Thanksgiving, and so I thought we’d think a little bit about the attitude of gratitude. I’ve chosen two scripture passages to guide us in our thoughts.

The first is from the book of Deuteronomy, which offers us a warning. We are told not to forget who it is that supplies our every need. You see, in times of plenty, it is easy to forget that God makes it all possible. Self-sufficiency is a deadly poison to the spirit.

To counter-act that deadly poison, we need to remember God. This is the attitude of gratitude, remembering it is God who supplies our every need. Verse 18 says: “You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the power to get wealth.

Moses was reminding God’s people it was God who had delivered them out of slavery in Egypt, and it was God who led them through the wilderness. It was God who fed them when they were hungry, and God who gave them drink when they were thirsty. It was God who brought them

into the Promised Land. The Bible then warns: “Take heed, lest you forget and think that you did it all by yourself.”

Success can ruin a person. Success can ruin a person’s faith by making them think they got there all by themselves, forgetting all of the people who loved them, supported them, and were assisting them, even when they were unaware of it, including God’s presence and help.

Sadly, the more we have, the less likely we are to thank God. Continuous bounty does not always create thankfulness. In fact, because there is such an abundance of prosperity, we now live in an age of entitlement. We have much, and for the most part we have concluded that we deserve all that we have, and probably even more.

True thanksgiving begins with humility, the humility to recognize that we did not create ourselves, that everything we are and everything we have is a gift. On the TV show *The Simpsons*, when Bart is asked to offer thanks at a family meal, he prays, “Dear God, we bought all this stuff with our own money, so thanks for nothing.”

Bart Simpson’s prayer summarizes the reigning sentiments of our age. Often, the more we have, the more likely we are to say, “Thanks for nothing.” God warns us against thinking that whatever success we have, we did it on our own. Self-sufficiency is a poison, and the attitude of gratitude is the antidote. It is the attitude that says, “All things come of thee, o Lord, and of thine own do we give to thee.”

The other scripture passage this morning comes from the gospel of Luke, who offers us a reminder: “Don’t forget to say thanks.” That is to say,

don't take your blessings for granted. Remember your manners and be sure to say "thank you."

Jesus heals ten lepers but only one of them returns to thank Jesus. And he is a Samaritan at that! He belongs to the wrong crowd, but he alone remembers to say thank you to Jesus for healing him. Jesus said to him, "Were not ten cleansed? Where then are the other nine. Rise and go your way. Your faith has made you well."

That's an interesting connection, isn't it? Jesus basically said, "Your spirit of thankfulness is an expression of your faith." It is your faith that has made you well. The attitude of gratitude is at the core of our faith experience.

In my opinion, and it is only my humble opinion, I believe that the attitude of gratitude may even be able to create faith in a person. As a person gives thanks to God, over and over again, she or he begins to realize just how wonderful our God is. Thankfulness can create faith. Think about that, and see what you think.

What is there to be thankful for? Let me begin to count the ways. How about for starters we give thanks for the gift of life itself. We're so accustomed to being alive that we take it for granted. Among those who are most grateful for life are those who have had a brush with death – an illness or an accident from which they have recovered.

But shouldn't we all be grateful? Shouldn't we all be grateful for each and every day that we're alive? None of us are guaranteed that we'll be here tomorrow. In a very real sense, each and every day is a miracle.

Have you taken time lately to be grateful for your five senses – your ability to see this magnificent world, the ability to hear the beauty of music or the sound of your lover’s voice? Do you take your sense of smell for granted? Lose it and your food becomes tasteless.

How bland is mealtime when we’ve lost our sense of taste – we go through the motions of eating, but where is the joy? Have you ever given God thanks for the ability to touch and feel things, the feel of your clothes or the sense of skin touching another person’s skin? Doesn’t a good hug feel good? Give God thanks for your five senses.

What about the people in your life, do you remember to thank God for them? Your parents, your children, your extended family – those who have helped to shape who you have become. Your friends, your co-workers, your brothers and sisters in Christ. Your church family, those who have helped you to grow in your faith, who have supported you in tough times and who have challenged you in your beliefs. Teachers, scout leaders, sports coaches, mentors – people who have helped you to grow.

We need to remember to thank God for the people in our lives. Some years ago, I read a story about a group of adult friends who held a reunion over the Thanksgiving season. They were in mid-life and were remembering significant people in each of their individual histories.

One member of the group said, “Well, I remember Mrs. Simpson, a middle school teacher who went out of her way to introduce me to Tennyson. He then launched into a colorful description of this woman who made an obvious impression on his life. She had awakened his literary interest and developed his gifts for expression.

“And does Mrs. Simpson know that she made such a contribution to your life?” a member of the group asked. “I’m afraid she doesn’t,” he replied. “I never told her.” “Why don’t you write her now?” someone suggested.

The challenge was accepted, even though he had no assurance Mrs. Simpson was still alive. That night, this balding man in his mid-40’s sat down and wrote his teacher of many years ago a Thanksgiving letter. It took a week and half for the letter to find her – being forwarded from town to town. Finally it reached her. The following handwritten note came back.

“My Dear Willie: I remember well your enthusiasm for Tennyson when I first introduced him to you. You were so beautifully responsive. My reward for telling you about Tennyson did not have to wait until your belated note of thanks came to me in my old age. I saw your eager response when you were in my class.

You will be interested to know that I taught school for 50 years. In all that time, yours is the first note of appreciation I have ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning and it cheered my lonely heart as nothing has cheered me in many years.”

Who do you remember with thanksgiving right now? What if you wrote one or two short notes to a few un-thanked people in your life who have blessed you on your life pilgrimage?

Today we have been giving a warning and a reminder. The warning is not to forget who supplies our blessings, lest we be deceived and think we got it all on our own. The reminder is simply this: “Don’t forget to say thanks.” Amen? Amen!