

“Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”

Date: November 24, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 17:11-19

Theme: Thanksgiving

Occasion: Thanksgiving Sunday and Christ the King Sunday

Next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent. And on the Christian calendar, it is the first Sunday of the new liturgical year. On *this* Sunday, however, we celebrate Christ the King Sunday; as well we remember to give thanks for our many blessings. The two occasions seem to go together well, because of all our blessings, the gift of God’s own Son, Christ our Savior, is the greatest gift of all. For Jesus, we give thanks. Amen?

In the familiar story of the ten men with leprosy who were healed by Jesus, only one returned to say “thank you.” What happened to the rest? Were they too busy? Too self-occupied? Is it possible that a few of those nine who didn’t say thanks, didn’t feel all that grateful?

Could it be they still felt like outcasts? Were they thinking to themselves, “Well, yes I’m healed; but now I’ve got to get a job and support myself. I lost everything while I was sick. My own family turned away from me. *What* do I do now?” And so, rather than feeling grateful for what had been done for them, they were anxious, perhaps even terrified of what lay ahead of them.

People react to life so differently. The little proverb that asks “Do you see the glass half-full or half-empty?” seems so appropriate. All ten were given a gift, but did all ten of them see what happened as a blessing? Many people have been blessed abundantly, but are they all grateful?

It reminds me of a little story. A young boy, maybe eight years old, went to a birthday party. When he came home his mother asked him, “Bobby, did you thank your friend’s Mom for the nice party?” And Bobby

answered her, “Well, I was going to, but a girl ahead of me said *thank you*. And the lady said not to mention it. So I didn’t.”

And so it is, that many people take what they have been given for granted, or assume they deserve what they have, or feel entitled to more. A sense of entitlement, I think, is one of the things eroding the greatness of our country.

Instead of being grateful for our blessings, many feel entitled to more. You can look down your nose and accuse the poor of having this attitude. But it’s not confined to poor people. The rich aren’t satisfied with their millions; they want billions of dollars.

And the kids growing up in middle class have long assumed that when they get their first job they’re going to be making as much as their mom or dad, and they’ll live in a house just like their parents, who worked 20 or 30 years to achieve some modest success.

The current economy is changing that point of view. Many people no longer believe the next generation will have a better life-style than their parents. And it’s making some people depressed and others angry. Part of the problem, in my humble opinion, is a sense of entitlement and a lack of gratitude.

We want more and we don’t appreciate what we have. We have been living in a society which believes that more and bigger is better. I think we have lost the essential attitude of gratitude because we have been driven by greed and entitlement.

Striving to get ahead, we have created a lifestyle of stress and anxiety. We have become a driven people who have forgotten how to enjoy the simple pleasures and blessings of life. Personally, I believe it is possible to live with less and be happier. Many who are poor in our eyes

are rich in faith, full of joy and happiness. They have learned to cultivate the attitude of gratitude.

Norman Vincent Peale tells the story of a man who discovered the benefits of being thankful in a sermon he preached entitled "Give Thanks Every Day." The man's name was William Stidger. He was, in his time, one of the most distinctive and persuasive preachers in this country; uniquely different from the ordinary.

He was a professor of theology and by implication a great scholar. But he also had a remarkable way of relating to people, a special quality known as the human touch. Dr. Peale became interested in his personality and interviewed him to learn more.

At one time, he learned, Bill Stidger had a nervous breakdown. For months he sat in gloom and mental darkness. He told Dr. Peale, "I cared for nothing about anything. Everything was hopeless, everything was dark, everything was black. I was utterly despondent."

Dr. Peale asked him how he emerged from all of this. The answer, in part, was by practicing the art of thanksgiving. One day a friend told him that with God's help he could slowly bring himself out of his despondency. "Think," his friend told him, "of people who have greatly helped you in your life, and ask yourself whether you ever thanked them."

"I can think of many right now, but I don't remember thanking any of them," Stidger said. "Well," his friend told him, "why don't you choose one of them and write that person a letter of thanks?"

Stidger gave it some thought, and then he remembered an old school teacher. He hadn't communicated with her in years, but he began to think about her. And he remembered the gift she had of being able to inspire her

students. It was she who had given him an appreciation of literature and made him love the great poets.

So, he sat down and wrote her a letter, telling her that her influence had been a great blessing to him, and that he had never forgotten her. He wrote that he wanted to thank her for what she had done for him.

He received a letter in reply, a letter written in the shaky handwriting of an elderly lady. "Dear Willy," she wrote, addressing him by his boyhood nickname. "When I read your letter, I was blinded by tears, for I remember you, and as I think of you now, I see you as a little fellow in my class. You have warmed my heart."

She continued, "I taught school for 50 years. Yours is the first letter of thanks I have ever received from a student. And I shall cherish it until I die."

This brought a ray of sunshine into Stidger's mind, and encouraged him to try another letter of appreciation, and then another, and another. Until he had written 500 such letters. In the years that followed, whenever depression would start to come upon him, he would take out copies of the letters he had written to people, and the happiness he felt then would well up in his heart again.

My friends, a great antidote to a heavy heart is giving thanks. I'm not saying that this exercise alone will always replace treatment for depression. But it is the corrective we need in our society that is addicted to more: Being thankful for the blessings already ours. And did you notice that saying thanks to others provided a two-fold blessing? Not only was the person who got the letter lifted up, so was he.

This thanksgiving, let's reach out to others, sharing the love and the gratitude. We can do for someone else who has less than we do; we can

share the blessings we have been given. We can also make a phone call, or write a letter to someone in our life who has made an impact on us, just to let them know. A word of thanks goes a long ways.

Six year old Aaron asked his mother what was for dinner. "Chicken soup," she replied. "My favorite food; thank God!" said Aaron excitedly. "Why are you thanking God," his mother asked, "I made the soup."

"Yeah," said Aaron, "but God made the chicken."

Smart young man, he was!

Every Sunday we sing the doxology. But do we ever stop to think what the words mean? "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

What if we made that a daily prayer? What if we began to look for all of those blessings, and to acknowledge that God is ultimately the source of all our blessings?

What if we began to give God thanks for each one, each time we recognized it, each and every day? You see, thanksgiving is not merely a holiday; it is a way of life. Let us remember to give God thanks, every day.

Amen? Amen!