On Being Thankful, Part 2, by Jenny Williams

My sermon today, titled On Being Thankful, Part Two is a continuation of my sermon On Being Thankful, which I gave the Sunday after Thanksgiving in 2009. Wow, a lot of time has passed, and I now have even more to be thankful for. My first sermon was mostly about my first kidney transplant. I wrote about it because the date was exactly nineteen years after my brother gave me his kidney. I will be forever thankful to him. Little did I know that two years later I would be back on dialysis, his kidney having worn out after 21 years. I would be on dialysis for three years, and would get the call that I had a kidney waiting for me in the middle of the night in May 2014. A woman had died from a stroke, and I was one of the lucky recipients of one of her kidneys. She helped so many people out that night, saved so many lives. I’m so thankful to her, and I’m so glad that she was an organ donor. I am one too, and even though they can’t use my kidneys, they can take everything else. Even when my 84-year-old father-in-law died, he was an organ donor, and they took skin cells from him so that they could grow more skin for people needing grafts. I encourage all of you to do the same.

Now it’s seven years later, and this kidney is starting to wear out. Second transplants usually last between seven and ten years, so I’m right on track. I am back on the transplant list, although I am inactive. Patients get put on the transplant list when their GFR goes below 20. I had a few months last year where mine was 12 – 19. So, they put me on the list. GFR is short for glomular filtration rate, and when I got my kidney, I think mine was 67. GFR is a percentage of function. So, in the beginning I was only functioning at 67%, but that’s pretty good for a transplant. Now I’m at 23%. Not great, but it’s been the same for a while now. I’ll take it. I feel fine, and at least when I do need a kidney, I’ll have enough time accrued and will have a better chance of getting a kidney. I’ll just have to wait and see. I was not happy when they called me to get me listed, I guess because I didn’t want to think about it. But I’m thankful for the process that allows me to be listed and get my time in, while someone who really needs a kidney can still get one first.

I’m thankful for a lot of things in my life. We all should be. I thank God every day for all that I have and for loving me. My exact words by the way. I know God loves me. I mean, look at my life. I’ve got it all. I’m thankful for my husband, my kids, and my sisters, who I could not breathe without. For all my family, even though I may not see them often enough. For my two dogs, who bark when someone is even thinking about turning on to Tiffany Circle. And for my three cats, who keep life funny. Although Friday night at 1:00 they weren’t so funny. Somehow, they had gotten into my bureau drawers and got stuck behind them. I was fast asleep, and when Dave came up after watching some movie he’s seen a million times, he heard them. He couldn’t see them though. We couldn’t get the drawers out of the bureau, so out came all my clothes. I may have too many of them. I mean, how did the cats even fit in there? Anyway, we got the smallest one out, but one was still stuck. Dave finally had to finagle the drawer to get her out. I was so thankful to him for figuring out how to help her. And we even laughed about it afterward, just because my cats are crazy. Didn’t curiosity kill the cat? And I finally had the chance to go through all of my clothes, get rid of things I don’t wear and change clothes out for the season, which I hadn’t even done yet. It's one of those things that I’ve been putting off (well, like most things I’ve got to do in my house). So, I’m thankful that I was forced into doing it.

There are several stories about thankfulness in the Bible. The first I would mention is obvious. It’s about Mary, the mother of Jesus. She didn’t flinch when she was told that she would bear a son, even when she wasn’t even married to Joseph yet. Think of all the people talking about her all the time, what she went through. Yet she took it all in stride, and thanked God for the opportunity. She proclaimed “My soul magnifies the Lord. And my spirit had rejoiced in God my Savior. For he has regarded His lowly maidservant. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.”My favorite story is the one about Hannah, who I really identified with when I was trying to have kids. Hannah was barren, and so she prayed to God saying, “I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.” Hannah was so thankful that she gave her only son to do God’s work.

We should all be thankful for all God has given us. I believe that yes, we work hard for what we have, but we don’t do it alone. I believe I was meant to be here now and to be doing what I’m doing. It’s God’s plan. And he’s got one for all of us. We should be grateful that he does. There’s a sign in one of the courtyards at the library that reads “Gratitude turns what we have into enough.”That is so true. Be happy with what you have. What’s the difference between thankfulness and gratitude? Thankfulness involves thanking someone for a benefit you receive. Think Mary, who had Jesus, and Hannah who had Samuel. Think someone who opens the door for you or who gives you a kidney. Gratitude is kind of a measure of thankfulness. You’re not thankful for one thing, you are thankful for everything. And I am thankful for every single thing that I have, whether it be big or small. I hope you are too. Amen