



***In Everything Give Thanks©***

Psalm 126; Colossians 3:12-17

November 22, 2015

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Well, you wouldn't know it by looking at our bulletin this morning, but today is recognized by the Church as Christ the King Sunday. It is the last Sunday of the liturgical year – that is, on the Church calendar, we have special days and seasons to celebrate.

Christ the King sort of wraps up all we've learned; all we've talked about and studied in this past year. We are celebrating that, looking back at everything that has happened in the last year, Christ reigns victorious in our hearts, and in our lives.

We started the year with Advent as we looked forward to celebrating the coming of Christ so long ago; as we longed for him to come again. We went through Epiphany and Lent and Easter and we remembered with joy that, even though Christ died, he also rose from the dead and is alive today.

And today, we can say, in spite of all the sorrow, all the pain in the world, all our grief and, yes, some fear – Christ still reigns. He is King in our hearts and in our lives.

No matter what has happened and no matter what will come, he is alive and he rules our lives. We might even die; we may even be killed by the enemy, and yet we will live forever because of Christ.

For this reason, I chose to have this Sunday be a Thanksgiving worship service. In light of all the terrorism and horrible things we see and hear; in spite of the knot we might have growing in our stomachs, wondering where all this is leading – we have so much to be thankful for.

We are told in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, that in everything we are to give thanks. The New Revised Standard version translates it this way: “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Seriously? In ALL circumstances? Most of us find that fairly difficult to do, don't we? I know I do. In fact, when things happen – even the most minute, unimportant thing that interrupts my plans or puts me in bed with a cold or whatever it is – giving thanks for it is not always my first reaction. Is it yours?

But I have to be somewhat ashamed of not giving thanks, if that is really what Christ calls us to do – in ALL circumstances. I think about the lives of the early Christians whom Paul wrote to – like the letter to the Colossians that we read from in chapter 3.

Colossae, a city in Asia Minor, which is now known as Turkey, was under attack. Not so much a physical attack as it was a religious attack. False religious teachers were trying to diminish the belief in Jesus as the Christ. The teaching was called Gnosticism and there were religious rules and rituals and false beliefs – all trying to sway the church to belief a different way.

Paul most likely writes his letter to the Colossians from prison in Rome to encourage them to hold fast to their faith in Jesus as being the ultimate, supreme ruler – the only one they needed.

The early churches in many places were under attack and were persecuted and many Christians were put to death. And look at Paul – in prison, waiting for whatever was coming, giving thanks to God in all circumstances, and encouraging all believers to do the same.

Remember Paul and Silas, after being beaten and thrown into prison, how they were singing and praising God? (Acts 16) “In everything give thanks.” Paul certainly practiced what he preached.

Today, here in America, our lives are full of blessings. We may have a lot of disagreements and views on – well – just about everything, it seems, these days. But we

still have freedom, we have homes, we have family, we have this place of warmth and welcome and worship.

Of course we are not exempt from sorrows and sickness and crime or death. And many in our country are homeless and cold and hungry. It isn't that we don't or won't have hardships. I do think that Christ calls us, who have so much, to take action for those who have so little. And in that, we also find blessings.

So tell me – what are you thankful for today? Just share one or two things to tell us all.

I'm thankful to be close to our daughter, Annie and her family and to be able to share a wonderful meal in her home with our grandchildren, and eat turkey prepared by our son-in-law – a chef!

I'm thankful for living here among you – faithful Christians – who have blessed Fred and me, every time we are with you.

G.K. Chesterton, who is said, by some, to be the greatest thinker and writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who wrote *The Everlasting Man* – a book which C.S. Lewis claimed led him from being an atheist to a Christian, wrote this:



Think about that a minute – thanks being the highest form of thought and gratitude being happiness that is doubled by wonder.

It's kind of deep and hard to wrap my little pea brain around. But if we look back at what Paul told the Colossians to do: clothing themselves with compassion and kindness, with humility, meekness and patience, reminding them to forgive one another, and above all to put on love as the most important thing of all, that binds “everything together in harmony,” – those words of Paul are high and worthy thoughts for us all, aren't they?

Paul says to do these things “as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.”

“Be thankful,” Paul writes. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts and the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

Sing praises 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 think Chesterton and Paul are both saying that thanking God is the highest form of praise. If we are truly giving thanks to God, praising him in all things – our thoughts are about as high as they can get!

And gratitude – being grateful – is “happiness doubled by wonder.” Have you ever had a time in your life when you felt so grateful that it just made you feel amazed – even stunned?

I'll show you a place where I've witness that kind of gratitude lately. The first one is from last May when I was in Kansas performing the wedding for Peter Opelt and his bride, Tiffany Carter.



I told you it was pouring rain and we ended up in a tent with lightening and thunder being in competition with the minister. Tiffany came into the tent – bridal gown wet and already muddy at the bottom, but the look on Peter’s face showed nothing but happiness and wonder. Gratitude for his beloved was definitely happiness doubled by wonder.

And then there is this picture that shows pure happiness as well. Little ones born into our families bring us such gratitude, don’t they?



Look at that face. Yes, the little one is cute, but I’m talking about the sheer joy on the adult face. If that isn’t happiness doubled by wonder, I don’t know what is.

This Thanksgiving – and all through the year – let us do as the scriptures tell us over and over again to do – in everything give thanks. Let our lives be an offering of thanks, praise and gratitude.

As the psalmist said, “The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.” May you know showers of blessings, and even if there are times when you are hurting, may you remember that God loves you so much that he has blessed us all with the best gift we could ever have – the gift of his son, Jesus – Christ the King – forever and ever.

Amen.



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