

## Dressing Up For Thanksgiving©

Psalm 100; Colossians 3:12-17

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There's something wonderful about Thanksgiving Day for me. Of course, there is a lot about it that is sentimental. It reminds me of past years with all my family. We would all go to my grandmother's house ...

By the way, do you know the song – “Over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house we go? The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh over the white and drifting snow. Over the river and through the woods, now grandmothers house I spy. Hurray for the fun, is the pudding done; hurray for the pumpkin pie!”

Who agrees with me that that is a Thanksgiving song? Who thinks it is a Christmas song?

Well, our family liked to sing in the car and we were way out in the country so as we traveled (not by sleigh – and often not in the snow) we would sing that song. We did go over the river, although I confess there weren't many woods on the prairie where we lived.

Anyway, the memories of just being in the car with all my family, excited about getting to Nana's house, breathing in those aromas of wonderful food as soon as we walked in the door; sitting at the extended table that went to the full length of the living room; sitting there with cousins and aunts and uncles and grandparents on both sides.

The fun, the food, the laughter, the singing – all of it brings back such nostalgia and that I almost want to cry. If you read my newsletter article you know that we were a musical family. We would sing the song “Bless This House” as part of our prayer.

Do you dress up for Thanksgiving? I've discovered that many people don't really dress up. I wonder if that was something we did more back in that era, or if it was just our family, but I loved dressing up. Not in fancy clothes but just looking nice for the special occasion. Something that spoke to how blessed and happy we were – thankful for our blessings, thankful for our family and homes and for the bounty we had at the table and every day.

The apostle Paul seemed to really love thanksgiving too. Well, not the American holiday called Thanksgiving Day. But in so many of his letters, he encourages people to be thankful.

He writes to the congregation in Thessalonica, chapter 5: *<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*”

“The will of God.” It is God's will that we are always rejoicing – full of joy; that we give thanks in all circumstances. That comes directly after he says to pray without ceasing.

Well, how in the world can we do that? I mean, we have to work, we have to answer the phone, look our texts, check Facebook, catch up with our president on Twitter, talk to friends, parent our children. Share pictures of our grandchildren.

Life is pretty busy isn't it? Surely God doesn't expect us to sit with our hands folded in prayer – or kneel on our knees for the rest of our lives, praying. What would we find to pray about that much, anyway?

Yet, this is what Paul says. It's God's will that we give thanks in all circumstances. So, I wonder if it is possible to be thankful for every circumstance.

Maybe Paul means that we should live in a thankful state of mind. That no matter what the circumstance, regardless of how painful something is, how frightening it might be, how challenging our life might get – if we live in a thankful place in our hearts and minds, we might be able to sense the power of God with us, helping us all the time.

Maybe praying without ceasing means living our lives in a state of thankfulness. Realizing God is always there for us and that we are blessed in spite of the hardships we might experience. Knowing we belong to God no matter what.

Paul wrote to the Colossians in the chapter before our text today: <sup>6</sup>“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, <sup>7</sup>rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

There it is again – “abounding in thanksgiving.” And here we see a major reason for our thankfulness. We have received Christ Jesus, the Lord. We are rooted and built up in Him. We are growing in the faith as we continue in him, and as we are more and more thankful, we are growing more and more in the faith.

And in today's text we find that even Paul says we should dress up for thanksgiving! There is a special thanksgiving wardrobe we should all have to wear for thanksgiving.

And what are those special clothes? Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. And if we look further in the closet, we find another important thing to wear – forgiveness.

Forgiveness is important, I think, because it is in our own experience of being forgiven that we find gratitude overflowing. We have been talking about extravagant generosity for weeks now and really, the greatest, most extravagant generosity we have ever known is in the gift God sent us of his own Son, Jesus. Our Savior. Who gave everything - his very life for us - so we would be forgiven of all our sin and would have a life forever with God, who loves us so much.

That alone is reason enough to be forever thankful; to live in a constant place of thanksgiving. God's love for us is so amazing and so completely perfect. How could we, who have experienced his love, his forgiveness, his many blessings, not be thankful?

And then, speaking of love, Paul says that above all, we should put on the clothes of love. It is in loving that we find harmony and peace – with one another and with God. Loving – as we are loved – creates that fertile place within our hearts that causes us to be thankful, to show compassion, to be kind and humble and patient.

When I think about the holiday of Thanksgiving, I have a little twinge of guilt -or at least a sense of reality. I realize as I've grown older that there are so many people in our world who are alone. People who do not have family to be with. For whatever reason, there are those who are estranged from their family. There are many people who feel so lonely and sad during the holidays.

I just recently did a memorial service for a man who had some struggles with addiction. He was not married and he had no children. But he did have a large family of siblings and it touched my heart to hear the memories and the stories and to experience the love they all felt for him. It didn't matter what had happened in his life – they were all so genuinely caring and in grief over the loss of this beloved person.

I have to say that usually, I keep my personal feelings separated from my professional work. But this one touched me in a way that is hard to describe. I too have a brother who has struggled with addiction most of his life. He has lost three wives and several children because of his lifelong problem and what it does to him.

At this time he is in a city alone and I am the only sibling he hears from. He is alone and he feels alone and I know that these holidays will be very hard for him. I know because when you come from a family that enjoyed being together so much, that had traditions and rituals of things you do every year; when you come from a large family and many have died and others have left you, it is a very hard time indeed.

Paul says if we are thankful for what God has given us in Christ Jesus, our Savior, then we should wear those thanksgiving clothes – having and showing compassion and forgiveness; being patient and humble – humble meaning not to consider ourselves above someone else, regardless of how it looks.

And the coat of all coats to wear – or maybe it's the foundational garments we wear that are called love – it is loving that keeps our own hearts in a thankful place. And if we live in that thankful place all the time, we are praying without ceasing just by being alive and by every breath we take.

May the Lord keep us in his love and shower us with his blessings and may we then, in turn, live our thankful lives by loving and sharing with others.

Happy Thanksgiving to all. Let's all dress up for thanksgiving.

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