

Devotions – November 24-30, 2019

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Sunday November 24, 2019

Here we are closing down another church year. Yes, our calendar is a little off from the secular one. But it is not growing seasons and weather changes that dictate the rhythm of worship. As we approach the completion of this season (after Pentecost) we are taken into Scriptural texts that are about the closing down of more than another year. We are being warned of a significant ending. Is there an appropriate attitude for us to take up at such a time as we anticipate the conclusion of life, of this earthly existence? As we review what our experience of living has been, with its struggles and pain, we know there have also been accomplishments and joy. No doubt then, there are feelings of gratitude that we've felt and expressed. So take a moment and consider your life thus far. It matters not how many decades you have seen; you just may have more to review. What tops your list of blessings? Are there any surprises about what you now can realize as a blessing?

Text: Psalm 95:1-5 (NRSV)

- O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!**
**² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!**
**³ For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.**
**⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.**
**⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.**

As you remember all the good you have been privileged to see, to do, and to enjoy, perhaps this psalm speaks to you. You need not fear facing our great God for in God is your best benefactor, the One who cares for you with diligence and faithfulness.

A starter for your own prayer: *Come to me, O Lord, come among us all, with your presence. Help me to know that you stand with me in this time. Show me that your love is so pervasive that you send me warnings so I may anticipate the good and the not so good, knowing there can be blessings in whatever comes. Open my eyes and ears and my imagination so I can proclaim my thanks today. Send the notes of a new song into my heart, a song that offers praise to You. In Jesus' name, Amen*



Monday, November 25, 2019

Jesus was ever mindful of the source of the nourishment that He received. He made sure to take time to give thanks.

Text: Matthew 15:36; 26:27

36 he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you;

Fold your hands, bow your head. Do you remember the ritual taught during your childhood? What were you thinking about as you prepared to share with others in this meal; were thanks actually being given? Or was it more likely you were wondering about what was on the menu for dessert? Were you considering a plan to get out of doing the dishes and clean-up? Were you playing with the dog under the table? Did you consider that One of whom the words spoke in appreciation or were your thoughts elsewhere? Are you any more focused today than you were as child? We hear Jesus giving thanks as He was about to feed thousands with a few loaves and fish. Did he experience a few twinges of concern wondering if this meal was truly going to stretch that far? As the disciples gathered around the table for the Passover Meal was Jesus’ nervous about this new interpretation he was fashioning with simple bread and wine? Is there comfort in the giving of thanks, in placing the responsibility on God as the Giver and does that relieve the pray-er from accountability?

Have you ever asked what it was that Jesus gave thanks for in these situations? Did he merely have a word of appreciation for the food and drink that God had provided through this amazing creation or was Jesus considering the long-range ramifications of his actions? Was he worrying that the crowds who got the lunch would expect such treatment on a regular basis? Did he think about His own death as the Passover became morphed into the Lord's Supper? Did he too have to fight the distractions that creep into prayer time?

And so it may be time for prayer: *Dear Lord, who invites us to your Meal, transform me by these gifts of food and drink. Give me strength through their nourishment and create in me a grateful heart so my thanks are sincere and focused. Lead me today to recognize those things, those people, those circumstances for which I ought to be giving thanks (add personal examples). Thank you for making me receptive to your Word and open to your grace. By the gentle touch of the Holy Spirit, inspire my gratitude. Amen*



Tuesday, November 26, 2019

Text: I Timothy 1:12

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service,

This is not a verse meant only to be applied to pastors. It matters little what your official title or role might be within your Christian community and congregation, Jesus has called you into service in His name. So with that commission in mind, we can see that there is here another opportunity for which we can be grateful. Depending on the week and how things have been going, you may or may not be feeling particularly grateful, however.

Sometimes we may think it would have been better if Jesus would have skipped our name and put another’s there instead. You might have had occasion to ignore the service you have been assigned. Or you may have assumed you should be exempt because you figured there was someone more suited, and that took you off the hook. But speaking of hooks – Jesus made it known early on that a primary task for His followers would be to be ‘catching’ people. Our faithful living, our witness of trust, is then the bait meant to attract others and convince them that Jesus is the One for them as well. So we can rely on the strength the Lord provides. That is where the gratitude surely enters in. We can be thankful that we do not need to go out on our own. We are

promised the support and companionship we will need, from Christ, and from the community of which we are a part.

Think about those individuals or groups that have been your fishing partners. Remember the times when with their presence and aid you have been much more effective in your service and more courageous in your approach. Give thanks for your brothers and sisters in the Lord who have walked with you or even dragged you along.

And so you can pray: *Spirit of Christ, my thanks go to you as you have rescued me from my stubborn refusals to heed Jesus' call. Thank you for pushing me out into the neighborhood and surprising me with moments of unintentional faith-sharing. Give me courage in the days to come so I take up the opportunities you provide for me to show kindness, mercy and trust, so others see Jesus in me. Stretch me through those positive responses to my awkward approach in order that one day I am hooked on faithful service to Your name. O Lord, hear my prayer. Amen*



Wednesday, November 27, 2019

Text: 2 Corinthians 9:10-12

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹² for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

Did you grow up on a farm or spend summers on the farm of a relative? Do you like to garden? Have you had so many beans, tomatoes, or zucchini that you had to cart them around to the neighbors, convincing them to take them off your hands? It is exciting to watch plants as they sprout, grow, and bloom. When the vegetables form, ripen and finally are ready to eat, the reward is sweet. Being able to share them is especially gratifying. Sure it was lots of work, back-breaking even. There were days when there was little joy, especially when weeding was required.

As Paul speaks about ministry, we can see how it is a farm chore. Seeds of faith are planted; they take root and grow. If you are privileged to see that process unfolding it too is a wonder. Those people of faith need attention, care, nourishment and protection from weeds just like the plants. It is the development toward maturity that takes place within your own life, too. This growth, the experience of sharing the resulting fruits, brings with it great thankfulness in us. As that thanks is expressed in public ways, even more thanks gets generated. Often gratitude begets more of the same, for it spawns reminders and recognition in others of their own feelings. Think about your own your growth in faith, about the ministry activities in which you have been a part. For what might you want to give thanks? Do it now:

Creator-God, Master Gardener, your patience is amazing. You watch the seeds germinate and grow, you see the weeds seek to entangle the new plant, squeezing it and placing it in the shade. So give us your protection. As I recognize the growth of my own faith and the fruit of my practice, I thank you Lord. (Name specifics of growth and ask for attention for those areas that need work.) By my life, lived with thankfulness, may others come to see the wonders You produce in your children and the effect it can have to make this a better place, a friendly community, an improved world. Hear my prayer. Amen



Thursday, November 28, 2019

Text: Colossians 3:16-17

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ 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.

Remember back to the last time you heard a child singing to themselves with enthusiasm. It was just for the pleasure of it, it didn't matter if the tune was off. It may be that you heard the song coming over the sound of spray from the shower or through the window from the yard. It was not a composition worthy of a concert hall performance but that wasn't the point; it was simply beautiful. This music was being voiced because they could, because the spirit moved within them, because sometimes a song is the only way to express your feelings.

In fact, the singer may have been a young preschooler, or you may have actually heard a child who has many decades under their belt. Still to let loose with such a joyful noise comes from the heart, out of the impetus of the moment. In this letter to the Colossians it was a similar expression of emotion that is being encouraged. We are told to feel free to sound out with heart-felt thanks so that not only God will get the message but all those around us will hear and believe it too. Gratitude is a pleasurable tune with a joy-filled message. You could take time out and write your own psalm/prayer right now. Here's some starters.

Come and fill me, O Lord, for you have done marvelous things (add your own examples) _____

The wonders of your works can be heard when I speak, saying: _____

My voice sounds out our praise for giving me _____

I am your child and so I sing because _____

Let me hold fast to your hand, letting you guide me today and every tomorrow, my gentle Redeemer. Amen



Friday, November 29, 2019

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-18

¹⁴ And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. ¹⁵ See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

It seems no matter where you live, urban, suburban or rural, you still want to have a group with which to belong. We need some close friends, we need bonds of shared experience, we need some common ideas and shared priorities to build community. The early church was organized with small bands of local believers that

shared much; sometimes in communal living arrangements with combined finances. You might hesitate in agreeing to such a bargain regardless of how swell that group melded and how fervent their devotion to Jesus!

The advice in these verses, however, might become even more clear to you considering such a life-style agreement. It would be necessary that everyone participate, doing whatever they could with the abilities and resources that they had. Patience would have been a key ingredient to success; as it is so often today. No revenge seeking could be tolerated; for mistakes and misunderstandings happen. It would be necessary to keep the good of all in mind for each decision and every action. It is no wonder “*pray without ceasing*” is highlighted here. It is hard to imagine this working smoothly among any of the people I know. Paul wrote many letters of encouragement and we know conflict did sometimes develop, even so. We hear his words: “*Rejoice always*” and “*give thanks in all circumstances*” with the constant prayer sandwiched in between. You must realize how impossible this assignment can seem. Our church life is set up a little differently, but the same advice would work for us, no doubt. Think this over. Find applications in your own circumstance. It may take ceaseless prayer, but the Lord is with you in all of your circumstances too. Jesus will go the whole way, step by step.

Pray: Oh my! Oh my Lord, help me, give me patience! To find a reason to be thankful in each circumstance is a big challenge. Fill me with your spirit, prepare me, step by step to overcome the problems and provide the vision so I can see them as possibilities. You, Lord, understand what it means to create a coherent, cooperative, loyal band of followers into a functioning church. That same task continues for us. Mold me and shape me as is your will and together we can build a community motivated by thankfulness. Amen



Saturday, November 30, 2019

Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:13

¹³ We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God’s word, which is also at work in you believers.

I sat there in the dentist’s chair, waiting to meet the new dentist and find out the plan for my tooth that had a piece that had broken off. The assistants had trouble getting an x-ray of the problem; odd shaped mouth, I guess. Sure enough the recommended solution involved a crown. I had suspected that would be the word I would hear, even though I hoped for a quick repair and to be done. Sure it is the most logical and even the wisest course of action, yet I resisted. It would take time and money, it would be uncomfortable, and it would not be done on this day! The word of the one in authority does need to be given due consideration, however. So there are appointments scheduled and a big check will have to be written. The word that carried the day, was not my own. My own understanding and insights are incomplete, and it was time to listen to another’s word.

Paul was grateful that the recipients of his letter were willing and even eager, to hear the word that had been spoken to them. It was the word of God, the One whose understanding is much more thorough and objective than our own, that they had received. The word of God comes from the One who loves us totally and forgives us whole heartedly. Yet we might want to resist it, we can even convince ourselves that we know better. That Word, from God, will make its own demands of us that could involve our time and money, require actions that make us uncomfortable, and can royally mess up our schedule. The unique aspect of this Word is that it carries with it a capability of its own. By means of the Spirit this Word brings faith, it generates the means for the confidence to utilize that word. We can move ahead with thanks knowing that we are being steered in the direction that is best for us and will be beneficial for others too.

Pray: *My Lord, with a heart filled with thanks I come to you. Yours is the Word of life, the Word of forgiveness, and the Word that brings peace into my world. Temper my streak of stubborn independence and make me receptive to you. Help me to recognize the positive results that come when I listen and not just take your word for granted. Show me how to order my life and enjoy the beauty and wonders that you open before me. In the name of the Word that makes all things new. Amen*

