

## Thanks - Giving

First Pres Benton Harbor 11/19

In the 18th century, author William Law wrote:

“Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world?

It is not he who prays most or fasts most;

it is not he who gives most alms or is most eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice;

The greatest saint is the one who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God wills,

who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness and has a heart always ready to praise God

for you could not do more for yourself than by this thankful spirit, for it turns all that it touches into happiness.”

In –1 Chronicles 16:34 we read.....

“Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
for his steadfast love endures forever!”

One of the ways to be more thanks-giving is to have a grateful heart.

This “grateful heart” thing escapes us sometime.

We actually have so much.....been so blessed.....  
that we forget.....to have that grateful heart and we fail to  
be “Thanks- giving” for much that we have.

We get so busy enjoying the blessing.....that we forget  
to bless the enjoyment!

Every good and precious thing in your life has come from  
God!

The more we remember that the closer we will be to God.

But this .....”attitude of gratitude” is hard to come by for  
some of us.

We have developed a sense of “entitlement’ when it  
comes to the blessings from our Lord.

Rather than seeing the blessings we are granted.....

We often find ourselves looking around.....and seeing the blessings of others.....and then deciding we are somehow.....less blessed.

This “relative sense” of ours can often cloud our perspective and leads us to an “ain’t it awful” attitude.

And we begin to focus on the things we DON’T have.

That “ain’t it awful” attitude is satan’s way of putting space between you and God.....

Space that he can fit into.

We should make a habit of expressing gratitude.

Thankfulness rather than despair should be our default position.

When you see something good in your life, point it out.

Thank God for it.

And when the trials come along.....thank God for His ultimate plan and allowing us to be part of it.

We all complain occasionally, but practice responding to your own complaining by finding things to be thankful for.

This helps to rewire your brain to be as proficient at recognizing the good in your life .....as you are at identifying the bad.

In the story: “The Color Purple” Cele had an awful life.

According to the story, written by Alice Walker, she suffered every indignity a human could suffer.

She was told from birth that she was ugly.

Sexually abused as a child....she had two children that were snatched from her arms at birth.

Physically and emotionally abused at home she was given to a man, as his wife, at sixteen.

He only added to the abuse she suffered and reenforced her ugliness.

The sister that she loved....and the only one who expressed any love for her.....was physically forced from her life!

But.....through it all she held on to her belief in God.

And through it all she stayed focused on the blessings that God had given her.

Mostly the little things.

In the Broadway play based on the book.....Fantasia Barino plays Cele and sings the show stopper song....  
“I’m Here.”

The song.....a testament to the power of God and the strength of the human spirit.....finds Cele singing these words when despair was taking her over.

“I don’t need you.....to love me!”

And she begins to share her blessings.

She sings:

“I’ve got my sister. She may not be here now.....but she’s still mine.....and I know.....that she still loves me.”

“I’ve got my children. I can’t hold them now.

They may not be here.

But they still mine.....

and I hope

They know I love them”

“Got my house.....it still keeps the cold out!”

“Got my chair.....when my body won't hold out!”

“Got my hands.....they still do what they ‘sposed” to!

“Got my eyes.....they don't see like they use to!

“Share my heart.....with the ones that I'm close to!

“And I'm thankful.”

Even in her miserable situation.....where many of us would find hopelessness.....Cele found things that led her to be thanks.....giving.

She gave thanks for the things that many of us fail to be thankful for.

Cele gave thanks for the essence of her being to the center of her joy!

Her relatives, her house, her hands, her eyes.....her God.

We are blessed when we are able to express gratitude regardless of the situation.

But be careful not to confuse “being thankful” for “thanks-giving.”

Being thankful is a condition. Thanks Giving is an action.

One of the challenges for Christians.....is to take action.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 .....Paul tells the Thessalonians to give thanks in all circumstances.

Now this sounds like shaky advice from Paul.

Give thanks an ALL circumstances?

When we are able to bring ourselves to “thanks giving”...

We are able to accept that God is in control.....that God has the whole world in his hands.....

And that God has the big picture that we can't necessarily see.

We can only know God is at work in these situations and working them out for our good and his glory.

And....like Cele.....we can look around ourselves.....and give thanks for the little things.....the blessings we get everyday that we take for granted.

Regardless of what's happening, we can thank God for his presence.

We can give thanks for God!

We can lift up our eyes to the heavens and say:

Lord I'm glad there's is you!

God is redeeming in all situations and sustains us through them!

And God covers us with blessings as we live our daily live!

Be thanks-giving!

On our own, we focus on the current situation.

We rise above the situation when we purposefully look for what God is doing in the middle of it.

It is said that it takes a purer faith to praise God for unrealized blessings .....than for those we once enjoyed or those we enjoy now.”

In our “Joys and Concerns” portion of the service we tend to have twice as many “concerns” as we do “joys.”

It appears easier for us to bring God the things that we are concerned about.....or the that we are afraid of.

But the things that we are given every day are oft overlooked.

Oh...we appreciate them all right.....when we think of them.

But we don't seem to focus on them until they're gone.

Every Sunday we sing: “Praise God from whom all blessings flow” .....but we fail to recognize and express what those blessings are.

When we are aware on a daily basis of the blessings we have.....it is easier to make gratitude a part of your attitude!

Because when we are focused on gratitude.....we become happy because of all that God is doing for

us.....and that happiness is spread to all the people around us.

Pastor Rick Warren once said, "To appreciate means to raise in value.

That's not only true of things, it's true of people.

That's not only true of people...it is true of God

When we appreciate God.....we raise God's value.

Warren goes on to say:

"When you appreciate somebody, you literally raise their value.

We ought to be "thanks - giving for the people around us because it increases their self worth."

Make it a regular practice to say thank you to people in your life.

Sometimes times are hard!

But we observe that people who are full of "thanks-giving" are able to persevere.

People who are vigilant to the blessings all around them are able to find hope to carry on.

Those same people.....with their sense of thanks.....can influence others to persevere.

Be a “thanks-giver” for someone else so that they are able to shine a light on the blessings all around them.

So what about those of us who have troubled hearts?

What about those of us who are keenly tuned into the sociology of our troubled times?

How can we go on?

Are we called to: “Don’t worry...be happy?”

In Ephesians 5, one of our scripture readings this morning.....

God points to a reality we rarely like to admit, but we know is true—

”the days are evil.”

We thought that was new news didn’t we?

Because we can readily see the evil all around us today!

But way back then.....through Paul.....God points out that there is evil in the world.

The brokenness in this world means we must make the best use of our time.

Paul tells us this for two reasons.

First, .....the days are evil because they trick us into thinking we have more time and opportunities than we really do.

Second, the days we live in introduces evil into our lives.

We must be careful to make sure these expressions of evil won't hobble us.

When the evil in our world, in our country, in our lives.....

Seems so pervasive.....

When the wrong doing is pointed out so clearly and so consistently....

And the evil seems to prevail!

We can lose our sense of hope.

We find it difficult to see opportunities to be “thanks-giving.”

I was somewhat intrigued by the section in our scripture that says:

Don't get drunk on wine, but be filled with the Spirit.

Ever since we learned to ferment fruit to create alcohol, we've been enamored with its ability to shield us from life's painful realities.

But Paul doesn't just tell us to avoid drunkenness; he instructs us to be filled with the Spirit!

Paul admonishes us to not ignore the difficulties in life by burying ourselves in worldly distractions!

You may think you're avoiding pain, but you're just postponing it.

Instead, Paul calls us to be filled with the Spirit, .....and you'll be equipped to deal with life's difficulties instead of avoiding them.

When filled with the spirit.....we are able to find opportunities for “Thanks-giving” all around us!

When we are filled with thanks-giving.....we become more generous.....

and we become more capable of fighting off the evil around us.

When we are filled with thanks.....giving

We are assured that God is in it...whatever it is.....and has already planned the outcome!

Our God doesn't just want to bless us so we can meet our own needs,

but he does it so we can meet the needs of others.

As we give generously in Jesus' name, the recipients thank God, not us.

God is increasingly generous to us.

You can see this in creation .....and in how he blesses people who follow him and those who don't.

God doesn't bless us because we deserve what he gives. God gives to us abundantly because it's his nature to be generous.

Anytime we realize how good God has been to us,

We should act generously with others because we're thankful for what God did with us.

Our generosity provides God's blessings and others are able to find reasons for "thanks-giving."

So this week.....as we gather around the table with family.....with friends.

And when you get to the point where everyone is sharing what they are thankful for....

Remember that all that you see, all that you have, .....is a blessing from God.....and is deserving of thanks-giving.

Try to remember the every day things in our lives that inspire thanks-giving.

Look around the table and see the embodiment of all God's blessings.

And in your mind and heart.....think of all that you have... And be enthusiastically.....thanks-giving.

Amen