

Date: Sunday November 22, 2009

Scripture: Thessalonians 5:12-18

Title: “Thanksgiving”

The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): The scripture reading reminds us to give thanks at all times.

The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): God is the giver all of all blessings and good things.

(Remember, it’s all about God!)

Today we begin with prayer. “Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer” (Psalm 19:14, NRSV). Thank you. Amen.

The professional football had just finished their daily practice session heading into the big Thanksgiving day game when a large turkey came strutting onto the field. While the players gazed in amazement, the turkey walked up to the head coach and demanded a tryout. Everyone stared in silence as the turkey caught pass after pass and ran right through the defensive line. When the turkey returned to the sidelines, the coach shouted, “You’re terrific!!! Sign up for the season, and I’ll see to it that you get a huge bonus.” “Forget the bonus,” the turkey said, “All I want to know is, will you keep me on the team past Thanksgiving Day” (The Holiday Spot Website).

Our blessings are varied. What is important to one may not be so important to another. A big bonus could be a blessing but so could a contract extension. Reverend Peter Pangore writes about this very idea as he tells the story of a father

of a wealthy family that took his son on a trip to the country with the intention of showing his son how poor people live. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what would be considered a very poor family. On their return home, the father asked his son, “How was the trip?” “It was great, Dad.” “Did you see how poor people live?” the father asked. “Oh, yeah,” said the son. “Well, tell me, what did you learn from the trip?” asked the father.

The son answered: “I saw that we have one dog, and they had four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden, and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden, and they have the stars at night. Our patio reaches to the front yard, and they have the whole horizon. We have a small piece of land to live on, and they have fields that go beyond our sight. We have servants who serve us, but they serve others. We buy our food, but they grow theirs. We have walls around our property to protect us; they have friends to protect them.”

The boy’s father was speechless. Then his son added, (Pangore) “Thanks, Dad, for helping me to see how blessed others are so that I can better appreciate what few blessings we have.

Today’s sermon is about being thankful for what we do have and for giving thanks for the same. Leo Tolstoy, one of the greatest European writers wrote a famous short story entitled, “How much land does a man need?” The story is about a peasant who doesn’t have enough land to satisfy him. He said, “If I had plenty of land, I shouldn’t fear the devil himself!” He purchased some more land by borrowing money from family and friends. The harvest was good and he

managed to pay off his debts in a year. His heart was filled with joy. However, the peasant became more possessive of his land. Later he was introduced to some other people who owned a huge amount of land. He went to them to try and take as much of their land for as low of a price as he could negotiate. But their counter offer was very unusual. The peasant was allowed to walk around as large an area as he wanted, starting at daybreak, marking his route along the way with a spade. If he reached the starting point by sunset that same day, the entire area of land that his route enclosed would be his for the sum of one thousand rubbles. He was very excited; he planned to cover a great distance. The next day he did just that making an attempt to cover much land. As sunset neared, however, he realized he was far from the starting point and so he ran back as fast as he could to where he began. He arrived just in time for the sunset. Everyone cheered his good fortune but the run had completely exhausted the peasant and he collapsed and died. He was buried in a six foot grave (Jeon). The peasant wasn't thankful for what he had and continually sought to have more.

The question becomes how much land do we really need and that question has many varied applications throughout our lives. In the peasant's case, all he really needed was a six foot grave. When we acknowledge the truth of what we really need in this life, then we are better able to appreciate what we have, to share our possessions with others, and to understand more clearly the gifts of God's love and grace which are freely given to everyone.

Among all our blessings for which we are to be grateful, it is God's gifts of

love and grace that we should be especially thankful for everyday and at this time of year. Now you might be wondering, just what is the best way to give thanks to God? Well, Reverend Ken Rummer writes about the big little words that we learn as children including words like “Momma” and “Daddy.” “I want” and “No” are a couple more. And of course, we learn “thank you.” I have to add that three of the first words I learned were, “Good Morning, Captain” as in Captain Kangaroo, but will save that for another sermon.

Thank you are two words that we have available to use throughout most of our lives. To use those words in appropriate social settings is one thing, but to say those words along with meaning that comes from the heart is another. Then there is saying thank you to God for all God’s good gifts. As a prayer, thank you is very strong. Johannes Eckhart, a Christian who lived about 700 hundred years ago, went so far as to write, “If the only prayer you ever said in your whole life was thank you that would suffice.”

With a prayer so short and so strong, we would probably think it easy to pray. This is a prayer we probably should have mastered years ago. But it seems to be a little prayer that brings big struggles. For example, when things are going bad, it is hard for folk to think of things to be thankful for. Our minds get filled with negative thoughts and images. Words like “Rats” and “Dang It” and others flow from our tongues along with our all time favorite prayer of “Help!” When things are going well, we usually tend to think that is because of our own efforts – “my hard work, my planning, my skill,” those are the words we tend to use. So regardless of our

circumstances being good or bad, and that covers just about every day, saying thank you to God for the gifts we have and the blessings we know in our lives doesn't seem to rise to the top of the list of things for us to do.

Sometimes a reminder might help like Thessalonians 5:18 that was read here this morning; "give thanks in all circumstances . . ." (NRSV). A national holiday such as the one we celebrate this week is another great reminder to offer thanks, although it is easy to become distracted. This week there will be many who thank the cooks for the good food and that is important. There will be fans across this land thanking the players for the big play at the game and that's OK. Others may even show deep thanks to the furniture manufactures for the favorite recliner or couch which can be necessary.

Still, in the origin of the holiday there is another recipient of thanks giving that was intended. Both the Pilgrims and Abraham Lincoln were clear on this point. They thought thanks should be given to God. They invited others to join them in doing that, an invitation extended to this very day.

So I invite all of you to join with me in letting our passage from Thessalonians and our upcoming national holiday be reminders to say thank you to God; For while our blessings are varied, we are all blessed, and the source of our blessings is the same – our gracious God. That is good news. So yes, thank you are the biggest little words we know but together they form the strongest prayer (Rummer). Let us pray them together right now, join with me, "Thank you!" Amen.

Offering: We show our thanksgiving through the offering we make. Let us give with thanksgiving. The ushers will please . . .

Dedication: Lord, accept and bless what we offer and know of our deep and abiding thanksgiving that we give to offer along with these gifts. Thankfully, Amen.

Benediction: Go forth this day with thanksgiving. All needed is provided. Great is thy faithfulness, God unto we. Go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.

Jeon, Heecheon; “How Much Land Does A Man Need?” ; Adams County Free Press: Corning, IA; 2009.

Pangore, Peter; “Poverty in Wealth”; Daily Devotions – First Radio Parish Church of America; 2009.

Rummer, Ken; “Big Little Words” ; Adams County Free Press: Corning, IA; 2009.

The Holiday Spot Website; www.theholidayspot.com ; 2009.