

Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
3rd Sunday of Thanks Giving, October 24, 2021
(Colossians 3:16-17, 2 Esdras 1:37)
“A is for Appreciation” by Rev. Sue Trigger

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS 3:16-17

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. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

THE BOOK OF 2 ESDRAS 1:37

Thus says the Lord Almighty...I call to witness the gratitude of the people that is to come, whose children rejoice with gladness; though they do not see me with bodily eyes, yet with the spirit they will believe the things I have said.

This is the third Sunday of the Season of Thanksgiving. Each week we are thinking about a word that begins with one of the letters of the word thanks. Today is A and our word for today is appreciation.

Dennis Linn, his wife Sheila Fabricant Linn, and his brother Matthew Linn are psychotherapists and spiritual directors from a Catholic background. Many years ago, they developed a habit they call “the examen.” It is very simple. They end each day the same way. They light a candle, spend five minutes in silence and then they ask themselves these two simple questions: For what moment today am I most grateful? For what moment today am I least grateful? I invited you to get comfortable, put your feet flat on the floor in front of you, close your eyes and breathe. Ask yourself, for what moment today am I most grateful, and for what moment am I least grateful? *(music)*

This is an exercise that can be done together, other times alone, but what is important is not only to name these moments, but to sit with your thoughts and wonder about why these moments came to mind. Ask yourself, “What am I learning about myself from this exercise?”

Thankfulness is at the core of living the Christian life. Cicero, the great Roman orator and philosopher, said, "A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue but the parent of all other virtues." Our entire lives as disciples and followers of Jesus Christ begin with thankfulness.

Our Scripture lesson from Colossians today follows the verses we read last week. Those verses ended with the admonition to "be thankful." Paul continued that thought in the two simple verses of today's lesson. In the first of these verses, Paul dealt with worship. "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." I was especially interested to read the phrase "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Not just in worship, but in everything we do, we are to give thanks. That's something the apostle Paul was good at. Look at the many letters he wrote to his congregations: each one begins with Paul offering thanksgiving. Paul was able to see God at work in all parts of his life and was thankful for that. Not all people seem to respond that way. In fact, some people are unable to be thankful no matter how much God does for them.

There's a story about a place in Mexico where hot springs and cold springs are found side by side--and because of the convenience of this natural phenomenon women often bring their laundry and boil their clothes in the hot springs and then rinse them in the cold ones. A tourist, who was watching this procedure commented to his tour guide: "I imagine that they think old Mother Nature is pretty generous to supply such ample, clean hot and cold water here side by side for their free use." The guide replied, "No, in fact there is much grumbling because she doesn't supply soap."

Learning to live a thankful life is an important practice, not just for God's benefit, but for our benefit too. Learning to be thankful opens our eyes to the many ways God is with us in our lives and to recognize God's love at work in the best and worst of times.

It is difficult to see God at work in times of sadness. When a loved one is afflicted with a serious illness, or when someone we care about is in an accident we often have trouble seeing

God. It's normal to feel angry at God. We may ask why God allowed this to happen? Sometimes we may wonder where God is. In the midst of these sad moments, there can also be much to be thankful for. I know that in crisis times, family members will often gather and tell stories that help them remember happier times with their loved one; friends will share humorous stories or instances of true friendship for which they are thankful. Being thankful and living a thankful life is not about denying the sad and difficult times in life, it is also a way of seeing God's loving presence with us even in the worst of times.

In her book, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom told about an incident that taught her the principle of giving thanks in all things. It was during World War II. Corrie and her sister, Betsy, together with her entire family, had been harboring Jewish people in their home, so they were arrested and imprisoned at Ravensbruck Camp, a concentration camp outside of Berlin.

The barracks they were taken to was extremely crowded with people and infested with fleas. One morning they read in their Bible from 1 Thessalonians. It was a reminder to rejoice in all things.

Betsy said, "Corrie, we've got to give thanks for this barracks and even for these fleas."

Corrie replied, "No way am I going to thank God for fleas." But Betsy was persuasive, and they did thank God even for the fleas.

During the months that followed, they found that their barracks was left relatively alone, and they could do Bible study, talk openly, and even pray in the barracks. It was their only place of refuge. Several months later they learned that the reason the guards never entered their barracks was because of the fleas.

This last year the world has been hit particularly hard with natural disasters. We've seen the powerful hurricanes hit our eastern and southern coastal states, but we've also seen fires out west, the devastating earthquake in Haiti, and other disasters that have affected people around the world. When survivors of these disasters are interviewed on T.V. there is usually someone who expresses gratitude for their lives, for the people who come to help them, for God's strength that helps them live on and rebuild. There are always expressions

of appreciation for family and friends. I've heard people say that they lost everything they owned, but their family survived and that's all that matters.

It's good that people have that kind of appreciation during a crisis, but how about in our daily lives? Sometimes appreciating what God has done for us gets lost in our daily grind. So I want to end much like we began, with the Examen, but this time I invite you to look back at your life this week. Maybe your week was filled with joy; maybe your life was filled with stress or sadness; maybe your life was dull and ordinary. Once again, close your eyes, breathe, and think about your week carefully. *(music)* Now take the time to ask yourself the two questions. For what moment last week was I most grateful? For what moment last week was I least grateful? When did you see God was with you. Do you recognize God's presence with you now that you didn't see in the moments you named?

We are grateful to God our creator, the one who gave us life; we are grateful to our redeemer, Jesus Christ, who showed us the depths of God's love for us through suffering and death; we are grateful to our sustainer, the Holy Spirit, God's presence with us in every moment of life to encourage and support us. When we take the time to appreciate all that we have in good times and bad, in sickness and in health; when we give thanks to God then the word of Christ will dwell richly within us. May it be so for each of us. Amen.