

“Giving Thanks”

Philippians 4:4-9

Message November 20 2022

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On this Thanksgiving Sunday, I am overcome with gratitude for this community. I have experienced such support and encouragement here at Tippe and I'm beyond excited about the ministries we're engaged in, which are so deeply rooted in social justice and love. I've heard Tippe referred to as “the little church that could,” and I experience that every day as we so often make a way out of no way! Each of you are part of that legacy and you've also gracefully made room for me as we imagine together how to continue this work in a world that has changed so drastically in some ways, and in other ways, hasn't changed at all.

I've been thinking a great deal about the transition that we've all been engaged in, just over this past year, as Pastor Karen has stepped further and further back in her role here at Tippe and I have worked to step further in. After worship today, we will participate in our Annual Meeting, part of which will address Pastor Karen's official retirement; the final phase of a much longer transition process that you all have embarked on together. This process, which has been rich with meaning, and mixed feelings, and countless adjustments, highlights for me the many ways we have all been called into change over and over again throughout the past few years.

As we reflect on the journey we've all been walking - throughout the cycles of COVID, the seasons of wildfires and hurricanes, the marches and protests, the elections and talking heads, the attempts to recalibrate and find our center – we can find comfort in the ancient words that come from our Bible Wisdom teachings.

The Apostle Paul immediately came to mind for me when I was seeking a scripture reading that would illustrate thanksgiving, gratitude, and celebration. In today's text, Paul is writing to the people of Philippi from a jail cell. Even from his incarceration, he models the kind of joy to which he is calling these Philippian Christians, rejoicing in the proclamation of the gospel.

Paul models for us the ability to take heart, to find hope, to mine our struggles, to find the brilliance that is cloaked in our pain and curb the

anxiety that rises up as we enter the unknown. This is such a potent message for us in this season of thanksgiving. Paul reveals to us a direct connection between gratitude and joy. As we pray, he says, do so “with thanksgiving.” “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Always!? I admit that on tough days, I struggle to rejoice in God. Instead, I tend to grumble AT God. But you know, when you think about it, you can’t be grateful and unhappy at the same time. I came across a wonderful quote from the writer, Amy Collette, that echoes this. She wrote, “Gratitude is a powerful catalyst for happiness. It’s the spark that lights a fire of joy in your soul.”

Joy is a common theme throughout the Bible. In the Book of Isaiah, God’s people give thanks because they have experienced salvation at God’s hands, in Psalm 90 we rejoice in God’s steadfast love and in Psalm 16 we rejoice in God’s presence. The Gospels proclaim the birth of the Savior, which was an occasion for joy. Just as an ordinary person might rejoice at the recovery of a lost sheep or coin or son, so also Luke tells us, “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.” Joy in the scriptures is rooted in the love and faithfulness of God.

Paul’s call to these Philippian Christians to rejoice in the Lord always/ is reminiscent of his call to the Thessalonian Christians to “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you”. I think it is significant that Paul doesn’t say “Give thanks FOR all circumstances,” as if we should be thankful for our adversities. Instead, he says, “Give thanks IN all circumstances”—knowing that God loves us and is present with us.

We are certainly navigating difficult circumstances in our time. Each of us have faced more challenges than we could have imagined - illness, family concerns, financial stressors, natural disasters - yet, sometimes glimmers of hope and gratitude bubble up unexpectedly – we come to understand that although struggle and pain are part of every human life, we also notice what is most precious to us. This shift in perspective empowers us to reset our priorities and appreciate what we do have.

Paul invites us to let go of worry, to practice prayer, to come to our relationship with God with gratitude, and to center ourselves in the peace that follows. As we celebrate Thanksgiving this week, it’s the perfect time to consider what you are grateful for. I try to imagine what it would be like to

be Paul, in a jail cell, writing to a community about all that there is to be grateful for and joyous about! What a powerful image.

Ask yourself:

- ❖ Do I live with a grateful heart?
- ❖ How do I express my gratitude?
- ❖ Where does joy show up in my life? Do I make room for it?

As we enter a short period of contemplation, I offer up this prayer, which emphasizes deep listening and the ways that silence opens us to transformation. May we be inclined toward the still, small voice.

*Help Me Listen
O Holy One,
I hear and say so many words,
yet yours is the word I need.
Speak now,
and help me listen;
and, if what I hear is silence,
let it quiet me,
let it disturb me,
let it touch my need,
let it break my pride,
let it shrink my certainties,
let it enlarge my wonder. Amen*