

“GRATITUDE...GRATITUDE....GRATITUDE”
**A SERMON BASED ON PAUL’S LETTER TO
THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI (PHILIPPIANS 4:1-9)
AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON
OCTOBER 11, 2020-----**

**SOME YEARS AGO A COLUMN APPEARED IN A
CALIFORNIA NEWSPAPER THAT TALKED ABOUT
“HALLOWTHANKMAS,” THE THREE MONTH
MARATHON OF CARD SENDING, PARTY
THROWING, PUTTING UP AND TAKING DOWN
DECORATIONS, OVEREATING AND
OVERBUYING.” ----SAYS THE WRITER,
“HALLOWTHANKMAS STARTS BEFORE
HALLOWEEN, CONTINUES THROUGH
THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS AND ENDS
AFTER NEW YEARS.**

NOBODY WILL ADMIT TO LIKING IT, BUT WE SEEM POWERLESS TO DUMP IT.”

SO WHAT IF WE COULD ACHIEVE AN INNER EQUANIMITY THAT WOULD ENABLE US TO SAIL THROUGH SUCH SEASONS WITH THEIR HECTIC PACE WITH A GLAD HEART AND SERENE SPIRIT?

GOOD DAYS AND BAD, HECTIC AND GRAY, A DEEP JOY AND CENTRAL PEACE..... AND NOT ONLY IN THIS IMPOSSIBLE SEASON, BUT ALL THE SEASONS OF OUR LIVES..... WHAT WOULD WE PUT OUT FOR THAT PRIZE?

WELL, THAT’S PRECISELY WHAT THE APOSTLE PAUL OFFERS HIS FRIENDS IN PHILIPPI LONG AGO.

“ALL JOY BE YOURS.” “THE PEACE OF GOD BE YOURS.”

NOTE THAT HE IS INTERESTED IN THE MOOD OF HIS FRIENDS..... MOOD DOES MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE, IN HOW WELL WE FUNCTION AT OUR LABORS, IN HOW WELL WE GET ALONG WITH ONE ANOTHER, IN OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WORLD AND IT’S FUTURE.

AND THE SECRET OF HIS OFFER SEEMS TO LIE IN TWO WORDS AT THE HEART OF HIS REMARKS, THE WORDS “WITH THANKSGIVING.”

**FOR THIS OLD STORY AND FAITH,
THANKSGIVING IS THE ONE INNER DYNAMIC, THE
ONE SPIRIT AND EMOTION, THAT OPENS US FOR
JOY AND PEACE AND HOPE.**

**NOT THE GRATITUDE OF A SEASONAL TURKEY
DINNER. NOT THE GRATITUDE OF “THANK YOU”
NOTES AFTER LAST NIGHT’S PARTY. RATHER
GRATITUDE AS A FUNDAMENTAL STANCE, ALL
PERVADING ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE.....**

**THE FAMOUS SAGE OF ANOTHER ERA, G.K.
CHESTERTON, WROTE: “THE TEST OF ALL
HAPPINESS IS GRATITUDE.”**

**SO THIS IS WHAT DOES IT, ACCORDING TO AN
OLD FAITH..... GRANT US INNER PEACE AND JOY,
BECAUSE *GRATITUDE IS THE ONE EMOTION
WHERE WE ARE TRULY FOCUSED OUTSIDE
OURSELVES*, TRULY CAUGHT UP IN THE GIFT
AND THE GIVER.**

**PAUL WRITES, “DO NOT BE ANXIOUS, BUT MAKE
YOUR NEEDS KNOWN... WITH THANKSGIVING.”**

**SO DOES GRATITUDE SAVE US, GRANT US INNER
PEACE AND STABILITY, JOY AND SENSE OF
PURPOSE BECAUSE IT IS ONE HUMAN EMOTION
IN WHICH WE ARE CLEARLY CALLED OUT OF
OURSELVES, CAUGHT UP WITH GOD AND LIFE.
*GRATITUDE DOES IT.***

BUT HOW TO GET IT.

IF I WERE TO STAND HERE AND TELL YOU THAT YOU ARE ALL A BUNCH OF DESPICABLE INGRATES; YOU SHOULD ALL BE MORE GRATEFUL FOR ALL THE ADVANTAGES YOU ENJOY, WOULD IT AROUSE FEELINGS OF GRATITUDE IN YOU? I DOUBT IT. MUCH MORE LIKELY IT WOULD AROUSE FEELINGS EITHER OF GUILT OR ANGER, DEPENDING UPON WHETHER YOU THOUGHT I HAD A RIGHT TO SPEAK TO YOU IN THAT WAY.....

**YOU CAN MAKE YOUR CHILD SAY “THANK YOU,”
AND YOU OUGHT TO DO SO BUT WE KNOW THAT
EVEN THAT IS NOT SO EASY IN THIS DAY.**

**ONE WOMAN WENT TO THE DRUGSTORE TO PICK
UP A PRESCRIPTION. SHE HAD HER FIVE-YEAR-
OLD ALONG, AND WHEN THE PHARMACIST GAVE
THE WOMAN HER MEDICINE, HE HANDED THE
BOY A PIECE OF CANDY. “WHAT DO YOU SAY TO
THE MAN,” PROMPTED THE MOTHER. WITHOUT
HESITATION, THE LITTLE GUY SAID BRIGHTLY,
“CHARGE IT!” -----SO.....YOU CAN INSIST THAT
YOUR CHILD SAY IT, BUT YOU CAN’T COERCE
THE ATTITUDE.**

NOR CAN WE FORCE GRATITUDE WITHIN US. WE CANNOT DIRECTLY CONJURE IT UP BY BEATING UP ON OURSELVES.....

SO HOW DOES GRATITUDE COME? FIRST OF ALL, I THINK GRATITUDE IS A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE, WHAT WE FOCUS ON, PAY ATTENTION TO IN LIFE..... THE GRATEFUL TEND TO BE THOSE WHO MAKE A PRACTICE OF PAYING ATTENTION TO THE POSITIVE.

THERE IS EVEN A GROWING SCHOOL OF THOUGHT IN THE WORLD OF PSYCHOLOGY CALLED “POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY,”

**WHICH ARGUES THAT IT IS THE RECALLING AND
SUSTAINING OF MEMORIES OF THE STRENGTHS
AND GIFTS OF OUR PAST -----RATHER THAN JUST
THE TRAUMAS AND DISASTERS---- THAT
DIMINISHES DEPRESSION AND ELEVATES
MOOD....**

**SO THE APOSTLE APPEALS TO HIS FRIENDS,
*“ALL THAT IS LOVEABLE AND GRACIOUS,
EXCELLENT AND ADMIRABLE, FILL ALL YOUR
THOUGHTS WITH THESE THINGS.”***

**JOSEPH FORT NEWTON, THE GREAT
CHURCHMAN OF ANOTHER CENTURY CALLS
ATTENTION TO RUPERT BROOKE AND HIS
INCLINATION TO INVENTORY THE THINGS FOR
WHICH HE WAS GRATEFUL.**

**“EACH ITEM MEANT A MEMORY, STARTED A
HAPPY THOUGHT, BROUGHT BACK A PICTURE,
REVIVED A JOY.” -----LOOK AT HIS LIST: “WHITE
PLATES AND CUPS; WET ROOFS BENEATH THE
LAMPLIGHT; THE STRONG CRUST OF FRIENDLY
BREAD; RAINBOWS; RADIANT RAINDROPS IN
FLOWER CUPS; THE COOL KINDLINESS OF
SHEETS; THE BENISON OF HOT WATER; SLEEP;
FOOTPRINTS IN THE DEW; OAK TREES;**

**SHINING HORSE CHESTNUTS; THE BLUE SMOKE
OF WOOD.”**

**THEN NEWTON COMMENTS IN CONTRAST. “FOR
THE PERSON LOST IN INGRATITUDE, EVERY
SUNSET IS BLEACHED OF COLOR; EVERY MEAL
IS RENDERED BLAND AND TASTELESS; EVERY
DREAM IS CANKERED; EVERY RELATIONSHIP IS
SOURD. INGRATITUDE STOPS PRAYER,
REPRESSES JOY, MISDIRECTS ENERGY, ROBES
THE MIDDLE YEARS OF THEIR PRODUCTIVITY,
AND CROWNS OLD AGE WITH A THORNY
WREATH OF BITTERNESS.”**

FURTHER, PAUL POINTS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUSING ON SOMEONE WE ADMIRE BEYOND OURSELVES AND HE IS NOT AFRAID TO SPEAK OF WHAT THEY HAVE SEEN AND HEARD IN HIM. BUT IF THIS IS SO OBVIOUS, WHY IS IT THAT WE SO OFTEN MISS IT? ----SOMETIMES WE DO NOT SEE AND APPRECIATE THE GOOD THINGS AND THE GOOD SOULS WHO PEOPLE OUR LIVES? IS IT NOT OFTEN BECAUSE WE GET CAUGHT UP IN ANOTHER KIND OF FOCUS AND PERSPECTIVE, ANOTHER KIND OF MOOD PRESSED UPON US BY THE CULTURE AROUND, WHETHER IN FIRST CENTURY ROME OR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AMERICA.

IS NOT THE GRATITUDE KILLER INVARIABLY
VARIOUS FORMS OF ENVY.

**WE ARE DIVERTED BY THE APPARENT
ADVANTAGES OF OTHERS, THE HOUSES AND
HAPPINESS, THE COMFORTS AND CHILDREN WE
SEE OVER THERE..... ENVY, AS MUCH AS
ANYTHING, CAN BE THE KILLER OF GRATITUDE,
A CENTRAL SOURCE OF UNHAPPINESS FOR
MANY IN THIS AFFLUENT AGE. ENVY OF THE
SUCCESS OF THE OTHER. THE APPARENT
HAPPINESS OF THEIR MARRIAGE. THE
INCREDIBLE CHILDREN THEY SEEM TO HAVE
MANAGED.**

WRITER, RESEARCHER AND JOURNALIST JUDITH VIORST CATCHES THE PROBLEM WELL. “SOME PEOPLE’S CHILDREN HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN A STARBOARD FROM A PORT, AND THAT INCHOATE WITHOUT THE IN IS NOT THE WAY A PERSON PRONOUNCES CHOATE AND SOME PEOPLE’S CHILDREN ARE NEVER ANYTHING LESS THAN THIRD OR THE FOURTH, AND ENTER LIFE EQUIPPED WITH A MUMMY, A NANNY, GOOD BONES, A PRIVATE INCOME, AND ALL THE RIGHT FRIENDS AND LABELS IN THEIR COATS.

**AND ... SOME PEOPLE'S CHILDREN ALWAYS
MARRY GIRLS NAMED WHITNEY CARTWRIGHT
OR CARTWRIGHT WHITNEY AND NEVER MARRY
GIRLS NAMED CHARMAINE GLITZ BUT EVEN IF
OUR CHILDREN WENT TO HARVARD AND JOINED
RACQUET CLUBS AND SUMMERED IN NEWPORT
AND WINTERED AT ST. MORITZ AND NO LONGER
TOOK OFF THEIR SHOES AND THEIR SOCKS IN
THE LIVING ROOM IN ORDER TO SCRATCH THE
BOTTOM OF THEIR FEET AND TURNED INTO
AMBASSADORS AND BANKERS AND GAVE UP
TRYING TO TALK AND EAT AT THE SAME TIME
AND EVEN IF THEY LEARNED WHICH THINGS
THAT, NO MATTER HOW MUCH THEY LIKE THEM,**

***THEY SHOULDN'T ADMIT IT AND EVEN IF THEY
LEARNED WHICH THINGS THAT NO MATTER HOW
MUCH THEY DIDN'T LIKE THEM, THEY SHOULD
AND EVEN IF THEY ACQUIRED THE FINEST IN
ELOCUTION AND RIDING BOOTS AND TAILORS
YOU STILL WOULD NEVER MISTAKE THEM FOR
SOME PEOPLE'S CHILDREN."***

***THINK ON THESE THINGS. WE CEASE BEING
GRATEFUL WHEN WE ENVY, WHICH IS ALSO
ATTENTION FOCUSED IN THE WRONG
DIRECTION.***

IN "THE PRISON CHRONICLE" ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN SAYS, "DON'T BE AFRAID OF MISFORTUNE AND DO NOT YEARN AFTER HAPPINESS. IT IS, AFTER ALL, ALL THE SAME. THE BITTER DOESN'T LAST FOREVER, AND THE SWEET NEVER FILLS THE CUP TO OVERFLOWING. IT IS ENOUGH IF YOU DON'T FREEZE IN THE COLD AND IF HUNGER AND THIRST DON'T CLAW AT YOUR SIDES. IF YOUR BACK ISN'T BROKEN, IF YOUR FEET CAN WALK, IF BOTH ARMS WORK, IF BOTH EYES CAN SEE, AND IF BOTH EARS CAN HEAR, THEN WHOM SHOULD YOU ENVY? AND WHY? OUR ENVY OF OTHERS DEVOURS US MOST OF ALL. RUB YOUR EYES..."

THE GRACE OF GRATITUDE COMES WHEN WE DEVELOP THE DISCIPLINE OF HEALTHY PERSPECTIVE. AND WHEN WE LEARN THE PATIENCE OF WAITING FOR THE SECRET GIFT IN THE BAD. I THINK THAT IS IMPLIED IN WHAT PAUL APPEALS FOR. HE DOESN'T SAY, "MAKE YOUR NEEDS KNOWN AND GOD WILL MEET THEM." HE SAYS "*LET OTHERS SEE YOUR PATIENCE. IN EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS, IN PRAYER WITH THANKSGIVING LET YOUR NEEDS BE KNOWN, AND THEN THE PEACE OF GOD WILL KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS.*"

**WE FIND PEACE AND JOY IN LEARNING TO
THANK GOD EVEN IN OUR TROUBLES FOR THE
GIFTS THAT INEVITABLY SURFACE RIGHT THERE.
SO OFTEN OUR ENVY AND COMPLAINT ARE
BASED ON OUR ASSUMPTION THAT LIFE WOULD
BE BETTER WITHOUT THE OBSTACLES,
HURDLES, TROUBLES, DEPRIVATIONS THAT
FALL OUR WAY. CAN WE BE SO SURE?
SOMETIMES IN THE MIDST OF LIFE, MIRED IN
DIFFICULT CHALLENGES, STRUGGLING
THROUGH PAINFUL EXPERIENCES,**

WE COME TOO QUICKLY TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THESE ARE UNMITIGATED INJUSTICES WITHOUT A REDEEMING SIDE. BUT OFTEN IN RETROSPECT WE LEARN TO THANK GOD FOR THEM.

CORRIE TEN BOOM WHO, WITH HER FAMILY LIVED THROUGH THE NAZI HOLOCAUST, HID JEWISH PEOPLE IN HER HOME TO KEEP THEM FROM BEING TAKEN TO THE CAMPS. LONG AFTERWARD SHE LOVED TO TELL THE STORY OF HOW SHE AND HER SISTER BETSY ENDED UP IN A NAZI PRISON CAMP THAT WAS SUCH A FLEA-RIDDEN, TERRIBLE PLACE THAT SHE COULDN'T STAND IT.

BETSY ONE DAY SAID, “BUT I HAVE FOUND SOMETHING IN THE BIBLE THAT WILL HELP US. IT SAYS, ‘IN ALL THINGS, GIVE THANKS.’” CORRIE SAID, “I CAN’T GIVE THANKS FOR THE FLEAS.” BETSY SAID, “GIVE THANKS THAT WE’RE TOGETHER. MOST FAMILIES HAVE BEEN SPLIT UP.” CORRIE THOUGHT, “I CAN DO THAT.” HER SISTER CONTINUED, “GIVE THANKS THAT SOMEHOW THE GUARDS DIDN’T CHECK OUR BELONGINGS AND OUR BIBLE IS WITH US.” SHE GAVE THANKS FOR THAT. BUT CORRIE SAID THAT SHE WOULD NOT EVEN THINK OF GIVING THANKS FOR THE FLEAS.

LATER THEY FOUND OUT THAT THE ONLY REASON THEY WERE NOT MOLESTED AND HARMED BY THE GUARDS WAS BECAUSE THEIR CAPTORS WERE SO REPULSED BY THE FLEAS THAT THEY WOULD NOT ENTER THEIR CELL.

CORRIE ALLOWED AS HOW THIS TAUGHT HER TO GIVE THANKS FOR ALL THINGS, BECAUSE YOU JUST NEVER KNOW...

SO PERHAPS THE REASON THANKSGIVING BRINGS INNER PEACE AND JOY IS BECAUSE AT ITS BEST IT INVOLVES GRATEFUL EMBRACE OF ALL OF OUR LIFE, ITS GOOD AND HARD, ITS BRIGHT AND DARK, AS SOMEHOW, NEVER-THE-LESS, THE GOOD GIFT OF GOD.

**IT MEANS LEARNING TO REJOICE IN WHO YOU
ARE, AS YOU ARE, RIGHT WHERE YOU
ARE....GRATEFULLY EMBRACING OUR PLACE
AND LOT IN LIFE.**

**IS THIS ANYTHING OTHER THAN THE SPIRIT OF
JESUS, WHO STRUGGLED LATE ONE NIGHT
OVER THE AGONY HE FACED THE NEXT DAY.....
“FATHER, NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS!”**

***PERHAPS THAT IS WHY PAUL REFERS TO THE
PEACE OF THANKSGIVING AS THE PEACE IN
CHRIST JESUS.....IT IS THE PEACE SHARED WITH
ONE WHO IS ABLE TO SEE IN A CROSS, THE GIFT
OF GOD TO US ALL.***

**THE ULTIMATE GRATITUDE COMES NOT WITH
PRETTY PACKAGES AND EASY WAYS, BUT WITH
THE ACCEPTANCE OF ALL THAT COMES, OF ALL
LIFE, AS GIFT, GLORIOUS PRECIOUS GIFT.**

**PERSPECTIVE WITH RESPECT TO THE GOOD IN
OUR LIVES..... PATIENCE BEFORE THE TROUBLES
AND TRIALS THAT DO COME, KNOWING THAT
EVEN THERE GOD HAS SOMETHING FOR US.**

AND FINALLY, PERFORMANCE..... SAY IT. DO IT.....

**I FIND IT HELPFUL THAT PAUL NEVER SAYS,
“FEEL IT.” HE SAYS, “REJOICE. AGAIN, I WILL
SAY REJOICE.” “MAKE YOUR NEEDS KNOWN
WITH THANKSGIVING.”**

HERE IS THE SIMPLE RECOGNITION THAT OFTEN
EMOTION FOLLOWS MOTION. PERFORM
THANKSGIVING.

A FAVORITE STORY OF A MAN WHO LEARNED THIS. CORNELIUS RYAN, AUTHOR OF BEST-SELLING NOVELS ON WORLD WAR II, INCLUDING A BRIDGE TOO FAR AND THE LONGEST DAY, HAD CANCER THE LAST 4-1/2 YEARS OF HIS LIFE – AN ORDEAL HE TERMED “THE LONGEST NIGHT.” HIS WIFE, KATHARINE MORGAN RYAN, WROTE ABOUT IT IN A BOOK CALLED *A PRIVATE BATTLE*. SHE INCLUDES THESE WORDS FROM HER HUSBAND, TELLING HOW HE FOUGHT AND WON.

“EACH MORNING, FOR THE PAST TWO OR THREE YEARS, THAT I’VE AWAKENED, THE FIRST WORDS THAT I’VE SAID, ARE ‘THANK YOU GOD FOR THIS FINE DAY.’ IT’S NOT MATTERED IF THE WEATHER HAS BEEN BAD OR GOOD. WHAT’S BEEN IMPORTANT IS THAT GOD HAD SEEN ME THROUGH THE NIGHT AND GIVEN ME ANOTHER DAY TO WORK AND BE WITH MY FAMILY. SO I CONTINUE TO THANK GOD.

HE’S ALLOWED ME TO DO WHAT IS IMPORTANT. I HAVE RECEIVED MORE THAN MY SHARE OF BLESSINGS. I’VE BEEN ABLE TO CRAM SO MUCH INTO MY LIFE.

THE MOST REWARDING MOMENTS, THE BEST WRITING, I THINK, I'VE DONE, THE LOVE I'VE HAD FROM MY WIFE AND CHILDREN, AND THE JOY I'VE TAKEN IN THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS. THEY HAVE ALL BEEN REALIZED ... BUT I WILL STILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT IT. I WILL CONTINUE TO SAY, 'THANK YOU GOD FOR THIS FINE DAY.'

SAY IT. SING IT. A STORY BEHIND ONE HYMN IN PARTICULAR LIFTS UP THE POWER OF SONG TO KEEP US GRATEFUL..... WORDS GIVEN TO US BY MARTIN RINKART AND THE LITTLE TOWN OF EILENBURG, SAXONY WHICH SUFFERED SO MUCH DURING THE THIRTY YEARS WAR.

**SACKED BY AUSTRIANS AND SWEDES ALIKE,
THE TOWN WAS CRAMMED WITH REFUGEES.
PLAGUE STRUCK, NOT ONCE, NOT TWICE, BUT
FOUR TIMES DURING TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS,
DECIMATING THE POPULATION, INCLUDING
PASTOR RINKART'S FAMILY. HE WAS THE ONLY
MINISTER WHO SURVIVED AND HAD TO DO AS
MANY AS FIFTY FUNERALS A DAY. YET IN THE
MIDST OF ALL THIS CHAOS MISERY HE
REVEALED THE SOURCE OF HIS STRENGTH AND
SERENITY. PASTOR RINKERT SAT DOWN IN HIS
STUDY AND PENNED THESE WORDS.**

“NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD WITH HEARTS
AND HANDS AND VOICES, WHO WONDROUS
THINGS HATH DONE, IN WHOM HIS WORLD
REJOICES, WHO FROM OUR MOTHER’S ARMS
HATH BLESSED US ON OUR WAY, WITH
COUNTLESS GIFTS OF LOVE, AND STILL IS OURS
TODAY.”

**REJOICE, AND AGAIN I WILL SAY REJOICE. GOD
IS NEAR, VERY NEAR.....**

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN**