

Love, Thankfulness and Gratitude

I have a funny story. This is a true story. I know a mother with school age children and she is very busy ferrying children to and fro. Horseback riding lessons, gymnastics, basketball, snowboarding and skiing, church and youth activities. She also has a full time job outside the home. She was suffering from a nasty cold recently but still as busy as ever. Her husband offered to bring home a rotisserie chicken from the supermarket for supper. At the end of supper, she informed the family that she was tired and was going to take a hot bath. Her husband promptly spoke up and said, "Who's going to put away the chicken?" I think she said something like, "I'm sure you guys can figure it out."

We do live in a busy world and it's hard to remember sometimes that our problems are often called "First World Problems". We may forget that a lot of other people do not live the pretty good lives that most of us as Americans live. Thanksgiving is in a few days and many of us will be gathering with family and friends for a delicious feast, perhaps consisting of turkey or ham, all the fixin's and pie to top it off.

We have a lot to be thankful for, not the least of which has been on a lot of people's minds this season, and that is, as Americans, we managed to pull off a pretty boring election day. I believe that quite a few people feared that there would be disruptions and perhaps even violence at the polling places. But, there wasn't anything eventful and for that we can be very thankful.

The Scripture lesson today is taken from Paul's letter to the Colossians. The Colossians were the citizens of Colossae and there had been trouble in their church with some people spreading heretical and legalistic beliefs which directly opposed Jesus' message of hope and the steps Jesus took to provide new life to believers. In Chapter 4 Paul refers to the fact that he is writing the letter from prison. (He references it again at the end of the book of Colossians when he beseeches the Colossians to "Remember my chains.") Paul encourages the Colossians to devote themselves to prayer, "keeping alert in it with thanksgiving", while at the same time, "pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should." Paul goes on to encourage and direct the Colossians to "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let

your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.”

While we may not be experiencing the restrictions of incarceration, in our own lives we do face challenges and limitations. Physical, emotional, relational, geographical and even spiritual barriers may keep us from doing all we want to do. In Chapter 3 verse 2, Paul encourages personal prayer, praying for oneself. “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth...”. There is also some good advice given to the Colossians by Paul. He instructs them to rid oneself of anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive language and lying to one another. He says, “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another..... and forgive each other”. “Clothe yourselves with love.....and be thankful.....with gratitude in your hearts.”

It's amazing how even little decisions and actions can make a difference in daily lives. Not honking at that person who cut you off while you were driving. Resisting the urge to reply with a sarcastic or cutting response to someone who has said something stupid or hurtful. Not getting upset with others who are oblivious to blocking the grocery store aisle or who walk right in front of your car in the store parking lot. Maybe it would be as small a deal as letting go of something that bothers you instead of dwelling on it and letting it fester!

Life is filled with decisions, some inconsequential and some momentous. It is not always easy to determine which is which. Joseph Stalin originally wanted to be a priest. He entered a theological seminary at the age of 14 on a scholarship. He stayed there for five years until his political activities and devotion to Karl Marx caused him to miss exams and be expelled. His biggest problem was deciding he was an atheist. Later, he became the dictator of Russia. He is thought to be responsible for the death and imprisonment of approximately 20 million people. How different history might have been and how many lives would have been different had he become a priest, devoted to Christ?

Here we are on the last Sunday of the Christian year. Our Lectionary calls it “Reign of Christ Sunday”. I have been more familiar with the term “Christ the King Sunday”. What does this mean—the Christ who reigns, and Christ the king? The gospel accounts redefine what it means to be king. The one who reigns over us is the one who was tried as a criminal, who was punished by oppressive authorities and crucified—one of the most heinous acts of killing a person. That is

the person that we worship and follow; the one who reigns over us. Christ our king. When we pray, let our prayers be filled with commitment to be a Christ follower.

When we leave our church building, how will we live differently? Will it be apparent that we are citizens not only of our country, but citizens of the kingdom of heaven? According to Paul, we will show love of God and neighbor in tangible ways each and every day, and follow through in community by doing it together with others. Our church community partakes of many mission opportunities and we regularly tithe from our cell tower income to support local and regional charities, community support groups, as well as groups such as homeless shelters, food shelf, drug and alcohol recovery, and our local school in myriad ways. Paul's words of clothing ourselves with love and being thankful, with gratitude in our hearts gives special meaning to our Thanksgiving holiday.

Thanks be to God!