

Gratitude Over All

I preached a message early on in the pandemic about the importance of having grace over all. We even had t-shirts made. In anticipation of Thanksgiving coming in a couple of weeks and with all that is happening in our nation, I want to share a message I've called Gratitude Over All. I thought about calling it gratitude and gravy or gratitude with a side of dressing, but, you get the point. Thanksgiving and gratitude need to be a way of life for the believer.

Speaking of gratitude, this past Wednesday, November 11th was Veteran's Day in America. It is a day set aside to honor those who have served our nation in the armed forces. It is a reminder to each of us that we owe a debt of gratitude to those who stood their post in defense of our nation. All of us who enjoy the blessings of freedom and democracy owe an expression of thanks and gratitude to you who have served. If you are a veteran of our armed forces, or if you are active duty, would you stand so we can express our gratitude and thanks to you! (Just as a way of honoring you, we have the various flags of our armed forces in the East Lobby today, if your family wants to get a picture of you with your branch's flag.) Thank you for your service.

I thought about our veterans this week and about the freedoms we enjoy in this nation. I also thought about the comments on social media, folks concerned about the direction our nation seems to be heading. I understand the concerns, and I am praying for revival and for truth and righteousness to prevail, but I wonder if it wouldn't help if we stopped and remembered how blessed we still are as a nation? If we aren't careful we find ourselves so distracted by all the bad news, by the media, by the disruption of covid19 to our lives and our schools and to church, the whole horrible mess of 2020 that we forget to be thankful for the blessings we have. Think about it, even in the midst of all the bad stuff, we are still enjoying the blessings of democracy and freedom. There are no troops in the streets of Tulsa, at least not yet. It still remains likely that if the legal challenges are defeated there will be a smooth transition of power without military intervention. We can still exercise our first amendment right to worship, to speak, to gripe and complain, to post all kinds of outrageous things on Facebook. (I especially love the "Facebook won't let you post the Lord's prayer so I'm posting the Lord's prayer in protest.") Some of you are exercising your second amendment right this very minute in this sanctuary I imagine. America is still a place immigrants dream, a desire to share in our freedoms and the blessings that come with being an American citizen. In spite of changes and challenges, we still

have much for which to be thankful. 2020 may have been the worst year for you, or for sure it's been one of the strangest, but we still have reason and cause to be grateful. The prophet Habakkuk declared, **“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.” Habakkuk 3:17-19** I'm still going to praise him, anyway. I'm still going to thank him and praise him. He is going to enable us to climb even higher, he will enable us to stand on the heights without slipping or falling so we just need to thank him in spite of it all!

Webster defines gratitude as **“A feeling of thankful appreciation for favors or benefits received.”** That makes sense doesn't it? We've been blessed with God's favor. We remember his benefits. Think of it this way. **Gratitude is a response to the answer to this question: Where did it all come from to begin with?** Once we figure out where the blessings came from, gratitude is our response. G.K. Chesterton once said the worst moment for an atheist was when they feel grateful and there is no one to thank. Thankfulness, gratitude, is the natural response to the answer to our question: where did it all come from? We know the answer. We know it has all come from the Lord. Everything we have, everything we are, life itself comes from the Lord, the giver of life and every good gift. If that's the case, and we know it is, then our daily, consistent, every moment attitude and response should be gratitude and thanksgiving to the Lord.

Gratitude for life. Every day we live is a gift from God, ordained by him. We were created by him, according to his plan and purpose. Our life, our breath, is a gift from the Lord and we should live in gratitude. The Psalmist David wrote, **“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Psalm 139:13-16**

Are you grateful for your life? Have you expressed thanks to the Lord today that you woke up, that you've been given strength for another day? You're alive, you're able to either come to church or to watch online. 2020 has been brutal, but you've survived every day of it so

far. You're still breathing, still overcoming, you're winning, you're more than a conqueror through Christ. "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love endures forever" the Psalmist said. (Psalm 136:1; Psalm 107:1) Be grateful for life today!

Gratitude for everything we have. Remember the question, where did it all come from to begin with? Consider all you have, all the blessings, the sunshine to warm you, a roof over your head, the breath you breathe, material possessions, friends, the freedom you enjoy, where you live, every benefit. Did you really earn that? Can you really say you did all this on your own? Of course not. God was the source. King David was collecting money and material to be used by Solomon his son in building the temple. As the money was collected, David prayed, **"Praise be to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor; for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things, in your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you and we have given you only what comes from your hand."** 1 Chronicles 29:10-14

Everything we have comes from God. What we have to offer him is only because he has first given it to us. Everything we have was created by him and for him and it holds together because of him. It all begins and ends with God himself. So when we realize where it all comes from to begin with, the natural response is gratitude. Thanksgiving. **"Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."** James 1:16-17

We can moan and cry about our problems and the things we lack, but a better plan is to give thanks for all we have, for all that God has graciously provided. We don't deserve it, but he has blessed us. Look around. You're doing better than most in this world. Try giving thanks for what you have.

Gratitude for grace. Being grateful for life, grateful for possession and provision, that's all good, but above all, we should be grateful for the gift of God's amazing grace. Paul says, **"As for you, you were dead in your transgression and sins...all of us...at one time,**

gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...for it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Ephesians 2:1-9

By grace you have been saved. While you were dead in transgressions and sin, he died to save you. It is the gift of God. Saved by grace, not by works, not by your effort, not by any merit of your own, but by his mercy and grace. When you realize what he has done for you, the only response is gratitude. We weren't lovely or lovable, we were sinners but he gave himself for us! We need to fall on our face before him in gratitude. Oh how he loves you and me!

Put aside all the distractions. Forget about elections and prophecies about the future and covid19 and all the irritations and obstacles and just focus for one minute on Jesus and all he has given to you, all the blessings he has bestowed and most of all, on the grace that he has given to you, salvation by his grace.

Father Brennan Manning tells in his book *The Signature of Jesus* about an experience he had. He writes, “In the winter of 1968 to 1969, I lived in a cave in the mountains of the Zaragosa Desert in Spain. For seven months I saw no one, never heard the sound of a human voice. Hewn out of the face of the mountain, the cave towered 6,000 feet above sea level. Each Sunday morning a brother from the village of Farlete below dropped off food, drinking water, and kerosene at a designated spot. Within the cave a stone partition divided the chapel on the right from the living quarters on the left. A stone slab covered with potato sacks served as a bed. The other furniture was a rugged granite desk, a wooden chair, a Sterno stove, and a kerosene lamp. On the wall of the chapel hung a three-foot crucifix. I awoke each morning at 2:00 am and went into the chapel for an hour of nocturnal adoration. On the night of December 13, during what began as a long and lonely hour of prayer, I heard in faith Jesus Christ say, ‘For love of you I left my Father’s side. I came to you who ran from me, fled me, who did not want to hear my name. For love of you I was covered with spit, punched, beaten and affixed to the wood of the cross.’ These words are burned on my life. Whether I am in a state of grace or disgrace, elation or depression, that night of fire quietly burns on. I looked at the crucifix for a long time,

figuratively saw the blood streaming from every pore of his body and heard the cry of his wounds: ‘This isn’t a joke. It is not a laughing matter to me that I have loved you.’ The longer I looked the more I realized that no man has ever loved me and no one ever could love me as he did. I went out of the cave, stood on the precipice, and shouted into the darkness, ‘Jesus, are you crazy? Are you out of your mind to have loved me so much?’ I learned that night what a wise old man had told me years earlier: ‘Only the one who has experienced it can know what the love of Jesus Christ is. Once you have experienced it, nothing else in the world will seem more beautiful or desirable.’

He loves you and he loves me so much. Where did it all come from to begin with? That was the question that has to be answered. And the answer is, it comes from him and from his love and from his grace and our response to that is...gratitude! Gratitude for our life, for every breath we breathe, for all we have, gratitude for salvation and for his amazing grace! Let gratitude change your perspective, your outlook and your response today and throughout this season. Let’s pray and express our gratitude to the Lord!

Here is your homework. This week I want you to cover everything and flavor everything with gratitude. Gratitude over all. And to help you do that, I want you to take time each day to think of and write down five things you are grateful for.

May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace!

We are receiving ten new members today. As I call your name if you will come forward and stand here at the front facing the audience.

Greg and Diane Cunningham

Jimmy and Chasey Hairrod

James “Jim” Lay

Mitchell Mefford

Sharon Smith

Malia Stephenson

Charley and Terri Wall

We welcome you. This is your church and it is a wonderful church. I believe you are better for being a part of this fellowship because the gifts and resources of this church are yours and we are better because you are a part of us now and we are blessed by the gifts and talents and resources you bring to the body as well.

For 35 years I’ve been reading this pledge to new members. “We are committed to you. You’ll never knowingly suffer at our hands. We will never say or do anything, knowingly, to hurt you. We will always, in every circumstance seek to help you and support you. If you’re down and we can lift you up, we’ll do that. Anything we have that you need, we’ll share with you and if need be we’ll give it to you. No matter what we find out about you and no matter what happens in the future, either good or bad, our commitment to you will never change. And there’s nothing you can do about it. You don’t have to respond. We just love you, and that’s what it means.

(Adapted from *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness* by Jerry Cook)

We won’t be coming by to shake your hand, but I want to pray for you as we receive you into the fellowship and membership of Carbondale Assembly of God.