

#93
November 17, 2019
Colossians 3:12-17
Thankful+Grateful=Thanks Giving

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be **thankful**. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through him.



Last weekend I had the delight of being one of the chaperones for a group of 5th graders on a trip to The National Museum of the United States Air Force in Ohio. It is an amazing museum.

When we arrived, I was assigned to two girls, along with Emma, for the scavenger hunt. We received a map and were given two and a half hours. Yes, God has blessed me with a few gifts but reading maps is not one of them.

Very quickly I realized it was going to be a disaster finding the answers with me as the leader. We gave it an honest effort but we desperately needed help. We asked some employees where to even start. Yes, I know it was all on the map. However, maps, for me, are like reading a book in Chinese. No one would help us.

Somehow we found ourselves next to another group with a leader who is much better with maps, museums, history and airplanes than me. I went to this man and asked if my little group could join his group. He said, "Sure." We were done in an hour with all the right answers.

Upon returning to the bus I found this man again to let him know how grateful I am for letting my group join his group.



In today's reading Paul is saying we are chosen by God. These girls had no choice in choosing their leader. They were assigned to me. They were not Emma's friends and they had no clue I was Emma's mother. If they had known my skills with maps and museums they would never have chosen me.

It is quite different with God. God is perfect in love and grace. God chose us to be His children. God chose me? It is hard to believe. It is difficult to comprehend that the infinite God became a finite being in the person of Jesus Christ.

Stanza 2 of hymn # 363 says, "Tis mystery all: the immortal dies! Who can explore God's strange design?" The hymn also asks, "Died he for me, who caused his pain? For me, who him to death pursued? Amazing love!"

God gave His Son, His only Son to die for you and me. I do not deserve it. I was a sinner and now I am a sinner saved by grace. I love the United Methodist church, in part, because of the doctrine of prevenient grace. Prevenient grace comes before I even say "yes" to God. This grace is the activity of the Holy Spirit who leads us and guides us before we even realize God is at work in our lives. God's grace is with every human being. Not all of us respond to God's grace and move forward into new life and a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ.



Paul writes we are holy and loved. Again, we are holy and loved. God's love through Christ gives us a new start. We are made holy which means set apart or different. We are made holy but how do we live holy? It says here, "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience"

For the trip to the aviation museum we needed to prepare our lunches. Emma and I prepared our lunches the night before. The problem was that I forgot them in the refrigerator. I found out it is very costly to leave without the things you need.

On this journey called life, we pay a very high price for forgetting to take the word of God with us. So as you leave today I will prepare you a package to take out into the mission field of this world. Do not leave this package here at home in this church building.

This package is 5 words: Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness, Patience.

As you get up in the morning, say these words: I clothe myself with Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness, Patience. Make a conscious choice to be dressed in holiness.

Wear these clothes all day each day. Do not leave your clothes laying around somewhere. It can be embarrassing to be caught without your clothes on.

It is also hard to put these clothes on if you are already wearing other garments. How do you put on God's clothes if you are wearing hate, gossip, anger, worries, an unforgiving spirit or even a craving for material possessions?

Jesus told a frightening parable about guests who were invited to the wedding feast but did not put on the appropriate apparel.

The Bible is filled not with suggestions or strong recommendations. It says you must. If you want what God offers, if you want to be a disciple, then this is the way. This is what you must do. You must forgive. There is no other option.

Above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. So that makes seven items in our package. Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness, Patience, Forgiveness, Love.



As I was meditating on this passage from Colossians, I had to stop and think. Is there a difference between thankful and grateful?

According to "Psychology Today", **gratitude** is an emotion expressing an appreciation for what one has as opposed to what one wants.

Thankful tends to be an automatic response like when someone holds open a door or gives a gift—most people automatically say thank you.

Gratefulness tends to be an emotional response to reflection of an occurrence or series of occurrences that have made a difference in your life.

Thankfulness refers to expression while gratitude is a state of being. I said thank you, right away, to the man who was leading that other group in the scavenger hunt. As we finished our time in museum I reflected and I felt gratitude. It was an inner feeling.

In today's reading we find three words: "And be **thankful**.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through him.

This is how I read what Paul is saying: Say "thank you" often. We nag on our children by asking, "What do you need to say?" The first step, baby step, is just be polite. Say "thank you."

Then for teenagers in faith Paul says: "Be grateful". According to one researcher, the main emotion the average American feels is disappointment. America is called the land of promise with unlimited opportunities for a better life. For many, life gets worse and more difficult as time goes by.

This carries over into our relationship with God. We expect God to give us health and wealth. We end up disappointed with God. How do you feel when you honestly, deeply pray and you do not receive? You stop praying, start praying carefully, limit yourself so you will not get even more disappointed? How about your faith?

Did you know there are more than 430 types of shampoos on the market? They all say, “Buy me to wash it, condition it, mousse it, dry it, curl it, straighten it, wax it, renew it.” There are thousands of books on what do you need to feel better, to relax, have a better life, to be happy.

I have very little interest in anything beyond faith because I know that all the fun things really do not bring peace. None of these brings me joy. They might be fun for a short time, but my life is too short to spend time for what lasts a few hours. After most of the “fun” you feel even more tired or spent more money than you had. Some of the entertainment leaves you with guilt and more empty and broken than before. From my experience and observation my soul is not filled and my mind is not in a better place.

You and I know that there is only one way not to feel disappointed and that is by knowing and serving God. Moving from disappointment to gratefulness is only possible when you live more with God and His word.

As children, we learn to say thank you. As teenagers, we reflect, we notice, we take time to see God’s goodness. It is a habit we develop and becomes a way of life.

From my kitchen window I can look at the non-stop traffic. I can look through the window and see the donkey. I can choose where I am going to fix my eyes.

You can choose to see all what you do not have. I can notice what I do not see: an ocean, a mountain, or a forest. If I wanted to, I could make a very long list of what I do not have.

You can choose to see how bad or mean everyone else is or you can train your mind, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to see goodness and to see beauty. It is very easy to be trapped by disappointment. Let us practice each day to focus on being grateful.

Today’s challenge #2: On the way out, stop at the little stations. Take a piece of little sticky paper. Reflect and write down things for which you are grateful that you have not noticed before. Think deeper and write a new thing. Most of us are grateful for kids, family, work, home. That is good, but push yourself to think of what you can be grateful for which you have not been thankful before.

Let’s hear Paul again: 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. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, ***giving thanks*** to God the Father through him.

Giving thanks – Thanksgiving – is gratitude in action. Christian maturity moves from simply saying thank you to being grateful. Then from it goes from being grateful to gratitude in action.

We can easily master saying “thank you” and even seeing goodness around us. Giving thanks requires action. We are getting closer to Thanksgiving Day. That is the right name. We give thanks. We take action in giving thanks.

Now for the third challenge. You cannot be a generous giver of thanks if you do not feel grateful. If you think God is not a good to you, you will not be able to be a cheerful and generous giver. If you are genuinely grateful and recognize God’s abundance and God’s goodness, it is time to practice giving thanks to God.

A while ago Andrew, my beloved spouse, shared a testimony. Something he said stuck with me. He said, when I go to work, I first work so I can give to God. He is an example for me in this. My first, human reaction is: What? Don’t you know we have three kids and bills to pay? How about food on the table? You cannot do that to our family! Don’t you care about our needs?

My witness is that we have an abundance. We never had less when we were generous to God first. We did have less when I spent on things that are not necessities, but never I can witness from my life, or anybody’s that I know, that they had less because they gave to God first. It is a breaking point: it is one of the most challenging things for me to do. To be honest, when it comes to offering to God, I can come with the best genuine excuses why not to give first and most to God.

I leave you today with three challenges:

#1 Dress yourself with what? Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness, Patience, Forgiveness and Love. Every morning, as you get up, may your first thought, well, maybe after coffee, be the words: Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness, Patience, Forgiveness, Love.

#2 On the way from the sanctuary, make it a priority to write down what you are thankful for that you have not thought of before. Take this little note and stick it on the board in the hallway.

#3 Mature from gratitude to expressing your gratefulness in giving first to God. I know there are many ways to give thanks. I am encouraging you to master maybe the hardest one: Giving generously to God of the first fruits of your labor.

It is the Thanksgiving Season. It is time, now and always, to show gratitude in action, to worship God first and to love Him with all our heart and with all that we have. It will be so good we will want to continue all the time.