

Deuteronomy 8:7-18, Luke 7:39-49
Thankful, Grateful, Blessed!
Sunday November 26th, 2017

We're between 2 holidays now: Thanksgiving and Christmas. To me this is an odd Sunday that occurs about once every 7 years. Most years this is the first Sunday of Advent, but Advent starts next week this year.

Anyway, I believe the first holiday holds the key to happiness in the 2nd, and in fact most all of life. The holiday of Thanksgiving calls us to be thankful, and grateful for all that we have, all that we have had, and the blessing and happiness that these have brought before we are immersed in the excesses of the Christmas season.

Oh, I know, like you, I started to see Christmas items for sale in August and the consumerism and greed of gift giving and receiving have run over the holiday of Thanksgiving in many ways. It's not "grandma that got run over by a reindeer" as that Classic Christmas song goes, its thanksgiving and gratitude that have been run over by the frenzy of Black Friday shopping.

Indeed Christmas can be a season of greed and getting accompanied by a sense of loss, victimhood (why didn't I get whatever) or a season of giving, joy and even happiness.

The key to happiness, and blessing, which are actually the same thing, has to do with what we concentrate on. Do we concentrate on what we have, and have had in our lives, or do we concentrate on what we don't have, and what we've lost? What is the focus of our hearts and minds in this season and throughout the year?

Here are two pictures of Thanksgiving.





Who do you think will be happier in the long run? Have a deeper abiding sense of Peace?

The Christmas Season can be a very unhappy time for the ungrateful and the unthankful. The advertisements of the season conspire to reinforce in us what we don't have, or have lost. It rarely seems to ask us to remember what we have, and have had, that was good in our lives to be celebrated. It seems the only time nostalgia is used is in order to sell us a car.

Our two scripture readings today show two very different situations of being **Thankful, Grateful and then Blessed!**

The Deuteronomy passage is part of Moses' words to the Israelites as they are about to enter the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey and water and copper etc. As you read about and think about it of course it sounds like modern day America and even like Arizona. The warning is not to forget. Don't forget the slavery of Egypt. Don't forget the hardship of the wilderness. Don't forget God who brought you through it all. It is a call to be thankful and grateful to God for all that they have survived and all that they now have and will receive.

Verse 10 reads, **"When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you."** This verse is the basis for the Jewish custom of table blessing, which we as Christians have continued. It is the basis for the blessing Jesus gave at the Last Supper and we continue in Holy Communion as we remember.



The Israelites were tested in the wilderness by want and now in the Promised Land they are to be tested by plenty. Plenty is the more serious test for the deceitfulness of riches blinds us as to its true source, who is God. The pride of our hearts in achievement turns our focus from God to ourselves. As verse 17 states, **“You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”** And so verse 18 warns, **“But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors,..”**

As I read this scripture I was reminded that “Thanksgiving” is not an automatic response of Human beings. Just think back to how many times your mom reminded you to say thanks or write those dreaded “Thank You” cards for Christmas and Birthday gifts. The feelings of joy and happiness at receiving something seem built in and automatic for us, but the response of saying “Thank You” needs to be learned and practiced and often we need to be reminded to do it.

The curious thing is that the more we seem to have, the less thankful we are, and the more reminders we need. Those of modest means give more as a percentage of their income than those of high income. And it is true, that when you seem to have and get everything that thankfulness and gratitude seem to go, and are replaced with pride, contempt and emptiness of life and soul.



Have you ever met a child who was given everything they wanted when they wanted it and without delay? I have and they have been very unhappy children for they are satisfied with nothing and living under the illusion they are the center of the universe, godlike in their being. None of them are happy. They are called “spoiled” for a reason. They are not happy with themselves, they are not happy with what they got and they don’t look forward to anything in the future.

Yes, affluence can lead to a loss of spirituality for with affluence often comes a loss of thankfulness. People tend to turn inward with pride rather than upward towards God.

And if you have an income of more than \$10 a day you are doing better than the 2/3rds of the world's 7 billion people. You are affluent. So the call is in the midst of our wealth to **remember God by being thankful, and grateful, because it will leave us blessed.**

Moving on to our Gospel story we see another way of being Thankful, and Grateful, which leads to being blessed.

At a previous church one Sunday we recognized a couple for their 63 wedding anniversary. As they were coming through the line shaking hands after the service I asked the woman, "How have you made 63 years of marriage?" I expected something like, "Commitment, love, our faith in God" as an answer.

She looked me in the eye and said, "I was 16 and I was pregnant." Her husband just stood behind her and shook his head.

But knowing her and her husband I knew they were thankful and grateful for that child and others that followed. They were thankful for their marriage and love; they were thankful for their faith and church that accepted them and celebrated them for what they were that day not what they were for a moment so many years before.

In our Gospel story we meet a woman who is described as a "sinner" now what her sins were are not described but I found in researching for this sermon that there were 8 other things besides "the oldest profession" this woman could have been involved in that could have gotten her labeled "a sinner."

In our Bible story today Jesus was invited to the Pharisee Simon's house for dinner. In those days wealthy people like Simon had their homes arranged around outdoor courtyards where such dinners were served. The courtyards were open to the public and when prominent Rabbi's like Jesus came to eat, the public would show up to listen to the

Rabbi speak, and they would sit around the walls of the courtyard. This is how the woman who was a “sinner” got in.

In Jesus’ day at dinners like this the guests would actually lay down on the floor with their feet behind them and rest their heads on their left hands as they ate.



This is how the woman could stand behind Jesus weeping and wash his feet with her tears, kiss them and wipe them with her hair. She then anointed his feet with ointment.

Now in Simon’s day if you invited an important person to dinner all the common hospitalities of the day would have been observed. You would have had their feet washed with water. You would have greeted them with a kiss and anointed their head with aromatic oil. None of these things Simon did, which makes you wonder why he invited Jesus. It certainly wasn’t out of love and respect for none was really shown except the invitation.

Now the parable of the 2 debtors point was that this “sinner” woman had already received Jesus’ forgiveness; so out of gratitude she showed her love by doing all the acts of hospitality that Simon didn’t do. Her presence and her actions scandalized Simon.

Now Jesus did not endorse, or ignore, or downplay her “sins”. They needed to be forgiven. He didn’t say they didn’t matter—they did. He forgave them. Verses 48-50 read, “Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” and he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Here clearly we see “Thankfulness, gratefulness (for forgiveness) leads directly to “Blessedness,” the peace of Jesus, which is wholeness and completeness. What we would say is new life.

I was inspired in this message by Dennis Prager and his talk on Thankfulness at PragerU.com and the story of one of the children who is now a young adult in Agua Prieta Mexico. Her name is Marilu. She was tested by the circumstances of life beyond what most of us have ever experienced.

She became a mom far too young at 16. Her husband, as a child, and his brothers and sisters had been abandoned by their father. His mother, whose picture is on our breezeway wall, was murdered when she was caught in the crossfire of a drug war shootout in Cananea Mexico. He and his siblings were raised as orphans by our sister church Fuente de Vida.

But Marilu married him, the love of her life, and went on to have another child. It’s funny when you are young it takes a while to figure out what causes that.

But the church supported her. She was and is thankful and grateful and tremendously blessed by God. She applied herself to her studies and recently graduated with a teaching degree and that is a person coming out of a slum, which when Vista Church first started working with it the average educational level of the adults was 3rd grade.

Now that she has graduated her husband going back to school to get his degree through your support; so they both can support their family and give back to their church and community. She and her achievement are the result of your support here, and her focus on God and his church. You make a difference in the life of others here.

Dee Berman wrote and translated the following from Marilu, “I received a lovely wood framed picture from one of the graduates, that she sent to Vista and the Roche Scholarship Fund with the following note:”



“On this very special Day, I want to thank God for your beautiful lives that have allowed me to live this beautiful experience and to graduate with my degree and license in Education. This would not have been possible without your enormous support. I give you a million thanks, because for year after year, you have provided the scholarship for my studies. Today, as I have culminated this goal, I will Always be eternally grateful to you and to God, for His eternal Grace to me. I love you and you will always be in my heart and in my prayers.”



She is thankful, grateful and blessed with the peace of Jesus Christ, which grants wholeness and new life. She is going on to be a blessing to so many others. She wants to teach and give back in gratitude to what has been given her.

To be happy, blessed in life, focus on what you have and not what you don't have. She could have focused on her shame, her poverty. But instead she focused on God and lived that out through her church. She was blessed with family, and marriage, and education, and children. **Thankful! Grateful! Blessed!**

The farthest in life we need to carry a sense of sinfulness and shame is to the foot of the cross. We need to drop all that there and pick up and attitude of gratitude and move on and never look back.

May you so focus this season on what you have, on what beauty and love you have had in this life, and on God and the **life to come: The Promised Land.** This will grant you blessing. It will grant you happiness and you will find peace.

So I want you to think “Happy Thoughts for a minute”, no we won't share today; but think of what you have that is a blessing, think of what

you are today grateful for. Look forward to our home forever with God and all our family and friends we will meet there. We will then stand to remember our God as we sing the Doxology and then a favorite old song of many “Count Your Blessings”, which puts to music the wisdom of this message.

1 minute of silence thanks and praise for what we have and have had in our lives.

Doxology