

“Thank You Note”

Luke 17:11-19 • Colossians 3:1-17

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 20, 2016

I really can't believe that Thanksgiving is this week. Anybody else feel like Thanksgiving kind of snuck up on you this year? Part of the problem may be that our culture seems to be squeezing out the Thanksgiving holiday. For years retailers have been trying to get people to do their Christmas shopping earlier and earlier. This year I was in Dillard's on September 23 and they already had Christmas decorations up. That's more than 3 months before Christmas! And in recent years Halloween has become more and more popular and so it seems as if Thanksgiving is getting squeezed out.

That wasn't always the case and for Christians, Thanksgiving should be one of the most important holidays of the year. As most of you know, the celebration of Thanksgiving in America can be traced back to the pilgrims in Plymouth, Massachusetts. You know the story. When they arrived the Indians helped them plant corn and the following fall they had such a bumper crop that they had a big feast. Except that's not exactly what happened. The truth is that the Pilgrims almost didn't make it. In fact, more than half of them didn't survive the first winter. And they didn't have a bumper crop. In addition to the drought that year that affected their crops, Governor Bradford wrote in his *History of Plymouth Plantation* that many of the people refused to work in the fields and instead would steal the produce as soon as it was edible. He described the colony as riddled with “corruption” and with “confusion and discontent.” And yet they stopped to thank God.

The idea was not a new one. They had brought the concept with them from England. You see the Puritans were Calvinists. Just like Presbyterians. One of the characteristics of Calvinists, especially at that time, was the rejection of special church holidays. The Puritans in particular wanted to focus attention on weekly Lord's Day worship and so they eliminated all church holidays, including

Christmas and Easter. In fact, a few years later in colonial Massachusetts it was actually illegal for a business to be closed on Christmas Day. However, instead of the church holidays the Puritans held special days of Thanksgiving and Prayer in response to God's providence. They did this every year.

In 1789, George Washington, at the request of Congress, proclaimed the first nationwide Thanksgiving. He wrote, “it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favour.”

So where did the Puritans and George Washington get the idea for a day of thanksgiving? From the Bible. The Bible mentions thanking God over 160 times. A third of those times are in the Psalms. As we saw with the Puritans, in the Bible thanksgiving is always a response to something God has done. For example, when the Israelites finish rebuilding the wall in Jerusalem despite the opposition from their enemies, Nehemiah leads the people in a thanksgiving celebration. Sometimes we even see people thanking God ahead of time. When Daniel learns that he will probably end up in the lion's den because of his faith he thanks God. And Jonah prays while he's inside the fish and promises to thank God and obey. And of course the ancient Israelites were to bring sacrifices to God as a way of showing their thankfulness.

I think two of the clearest passages on Thanksgiving might be the two we read this morning. Paul tells the Colossians, “be thankful...sing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 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.” What does it mean for us to be thankful?

I suggest that thanksgiving is made up of two parts: attitude and actions. Last week I received a nice thank you note from someone. I

wasn't expecting it and it was such a nice gesture. It made me feel genuinely appreciated. But sometimes you receive a thank you note that doesn't necessarily give you the same feeling. Maybe it seems as though the note was sent because it was expected. A young couple hadn't been married very long and they were trying to send out thank you notes for all the gifts. The young woman asked her new husband to write a thank you note for a set of kitchen knives they had received. He wrote, "Dear Wedding Guest, thank you for the knives. They will be good for cutting. Sincerely, Dan." The action was there but maybe the attitude wasn't.

Colossians 3 gives can help us understand both the actions and attitudes that demonstrate our thankfulness to God. Paul tells us the actions that demonstrate that we are thankful. "Put to death there fore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." We show God that we are thankful for what he has done and is doing in our lives by putting away "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk." He goes on, "Do not lie to one another." In verse 11 he is basically saying to treat everyone with dignity and respect. He also tells us to forgive. We are to worship and study the Scriptures. In fact, he says that our whole life – whatever you do – is to be lived as a demonstration of our thankfulness to God. How are you doing with that? A good way to know is by how much you serve and give to God's work.

But those are just actions. It's possible to do all of that without really having a changed heart. So Paul also tells us what an attitude of thankfulness looks like. Beginning in verse 12: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." Unless your heart is changed you will find it very hard to avoid the

vices that Paul mentions. He's simply describing how we are without Jesus.

And that's really the point. Actions that show we are thankful really should flow from an attitude of gratitude. And that thankful attitude is only possible when you realize what you have to be thankful for. That's why Paul starts this passage by saying, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

You are valuable to God. He loves you so much and was willing to become human and to suffer and die so that you could have a relationship with Him. Your old self died and so you don't have to live that way any more. As a follower of Jesus you don't have to live with anger or malice or covetousness. You are now free to forgive because God has forgiven you. Because of Jesus you are no longer subject to the wrath of God but instead you can experience the love of God. That should radically transform your attitude *and* your actions.

This Thanksgiving, take some time to think about the true meaning of the holiday. Think about what God has done for you. Thank Him for the way He blesses you. I know you have struggles. We all do. But spend some time focusing on Jesus. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Forgive someone. And remember that your actions and your attitude are *your* thank you note to God.

Amen.