

Date: November 22, 2020

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Title: *"A Service of Thanksgiving and Praise"*

Series: *"Thanks Prayer"*

In 2014 Sue and I were able to visit the Holy Land. The Faulconers and the Michaels went as well. We were part of a tour group and the agency that planned our itinerary added two days in Paris and a day in Amsterdam on the end of our trip. Paris was great, but Amsterdam was especially memorable because while we were there, we visited the home of Corrie Ten Boom and her family.

How many of you have read the book *The Hiding Place* or seen the movie? For those of you who haven't, Corrie and her family sheltered Jews from the Nazis during WW2. They had a special hidden room built where Jews could and would hide from German soldiers who would try and arrest them and send them to camps, like Auschwitz, where they would be killed in the gas chamber as part of Hitler's "final solution." The Ten Boom family helped hundreds escape this fate, until they were found out and arrested themselves. All but Corrie died in concentration camps. The only reason she lived is because she was released due to a "clerical error."

Corrie and her sister Betsy were sent to a women's camp called Ravensbruck and were able to stay together. When they were taken to their barracks, they found a huge room with a series of massive square platforms, stacked three levels high and placed so close together that people had to walk single-file to pass between them. Rancid straw was scattered over the platforms, which served as communal beds for hundreds of women.

Corrie and Betsie found they could not sit upright on their own platform without hitting their heads on the deck above them. The straw was infested with fleas. When Corrie took it all in; the crowded "beds," the stink, the fleas, she said, *"What are we to do?"*

Then Corrie noticed that her sister was praying. When she finished Betsy said, *"God has given us the answer as He always does in the Bible this morning. Where was it? Read that part again!"*

Corrie checked to make sure no guards were nearby, then drew from a pouch a small Bible she had managed to smuggle into the concentration camp. *"It was in First Thessalonians,"* she said, finding the passage in the feeble light. *"Here it is: 'Comfort the frightened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus ...' "* (1 Thessalonians 5:14-18).

"That's it!" Betsie interrupted. *"That's His answer. 'Give thanks in all circumstances!' That's what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this barracks!"*

And then Betsy reminded her perplexed sister all the ways God had blessed them.

- They were still together.
- They had a Bible, one that Corrie had miraculously been able to smuggle in.
- They were in a room crowded with people who would be blessed by reading and studying that Bible.

Corrie reluctantly said, *"Oh, all right. Thank You God for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed, suffocating crowds...but Betsie there is no way even God can make me grateful for a flea!"*

Betsie said, *"The Scripture said "'Give thanks in all circumstances,' It doesn't say, 'in pleasant circumstances.' Fleas are part of this place where God has put us."*

So they stood between the stacks of bunks and gave thanks for fleas, though on that occasion Corrie thought Betsie was surely wrong. But, as the weeks passed, they learned that the fleas were indeed a blessing from God

because the fleas kept the guards from coming into their barracks, which gave them freedom to teach the Bible to all those women without fear of discovery.

We can and must learn from the Ten Boom sisters' experience. Even when faced with deeply trying and discouraging circumstances, God's blessings are all around us. His mercies are new EVERY morning. Some of those blessings come as a result of the difficulties we're facing. Seeing those blessings is a source of encouragement and strength to HELP us persevere through the kind of tough times we have experienced this year.

As I have thought back through this year I can see LOTS of reasons to thank God.

- Matt Jenkins and AV Team
- Bill Archer---virtual choir and all virtual music
- Peggy---virtual Children's programming
- Christy's skills in setting up social distancing worship
- Richard's hard work with our hospitality team
- ZOOM
- Distancing lunches
- Facemasks
- Additions! We have had 17 since last year, 10 in Covid, and 4 of those were baptisms!
- I haven't done a Covid funeral. I have done funerals---but not as many as in prior years.

We have said good-bye to dear people though; Ann Eubanks, Barbara Young, and Catherine McGuire. Maria Ramos' husband Carlos passed away a week ago but praise God he made a profession of faith before he died. Those services make me praise God for the fact that Jesus rose on the third day and conquered death for us. This means all our "good-byes" are temporary. A day will dawn when we will all be together again. Death has lost its sting, thanks to Jesus.

Well, I could go on and on, but suffice it to say that GOD IS GOOD ALL THE TIME and, as He has been in the past, in 2020 He has once again been VERY good to this church! Our loving Heavenly Father continues to shower His blessings on us. Hebrews 12:28 encourages us to: "***be thankful and so WORSHIP God acceptably with reverence and awe...***" Hence the need for a service like this.

At my request five individuals or couples have prepared prayers for this purpose. So, let us now enter a time of conversational prayer---a time of communicating together with God---eyes and ears open---as we hear these prayers of thanks and offer our own.

So, now, let us pray, "***Heavenly Father, Hear now these, the prayers of Your people:***"

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Now it is your chance to JOIN in this time of thanks-praying. Let us all bow our heads and all thank God, praying together at the same time. Pray out loud if you want; in your seat or on your knees, but pray and thank God for all of His blessings.

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Father God,

We are Your people—the sheep of Your pasture and we have come this morning to worship You with glad and joyful songs—inspired by Who You are and for What You have done. For, You are good and Your love endures forever; Your faithfulness continues through all generations.

And all God's people said....A-MEN