

Sermon

Now Thank We All Our God

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, November 20, 2022

Christ the King

Luke 23:33 When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34 [Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." a] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35 And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Col. 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

I. For what are we thankful?

- A. If you have work and it is good - give thanks.**
 - 1. If you have work and it is a trial - perhaps still be glad for work to do.**
- B. If your health is good - give thanks**
 - 1. If it is not - perhaps give thanks for medical treatments, or the hope of health after healing.**
- C. If there is financial security - give thanks**
 - 1. And if financial strength eludes you - perhaps give thanks for the simplicity of “enough.”**

II. Sitting in this worship space it is not hard to be thankful

- A. Artists both from years ago and from the present who have surrounded the space in color and beauty**
- B. Faithful people whose gifts and tenacious fidelity led to the construction of our church and to the retirement of the debt of that construction.**
- C. Musicians whose many hours of practice alone - fills the space with music when we are together.**

D. For the community of faithful mothers and fathers of faith who preserved the Bible and handed down to us a Word which does not cease from provoking and encouraging us a followers of Jesus.

III. Clearly *many* at Cary Presbyterian Church have *already* shown remarkable generosity of spirit

A. Sharing their wealth,

B. Sharing their time

C. Sharing their talents.

D. We are a congregation *wealthy* by any standard you choose to use:

1. Good and kind people

2. Industrious and committed staff

3. Signs of the work of God among us

4. Countless gifts and talents spread throughout the congregation

5. Located in a fine community - which has enjoyed a sustained economic boom for many years.

E. God has been very good to entrust so much to us.

IV. The question follows, then, “Given the remarkable *history of generosity* which has positioned us so strongly, and given God’s on-going and prodigal generosity — putting *so many gifts into our care right now* — how do we respond?

A. A paraphrase of our passage from Colossians today might sound something like this:

Paul hopes that we come to know God’s will and bear fruit worthy of the Lord — learning both patience and the practice of giving thanks always. Why? Because of God’s long suffering and costly love for us which we can see most clearly in the crucifixion.

B. We give thanks because we recognize that God has done something for us that we could not manage to do for ourselves.

1. We have a debt of gratitude.

C. A debt of gratitude is one which only *we* can choose to take on.

1. Only if we recognize the gifts given will we feel gratitude for the gifts and adopt an attitude of thanksgiving.

D. I sometimes wonder if this was easier for our ancient forebears who lived closer to the ground.

1. Little to no ability to impact the shining of the sun or the falling of the rain or the coming and going of freezing temperatures — let alone the coming and going of disease or insects which devoured the harvest.

2. **The fragility of our lives then and the obvious limits of our capacity to insure ourselves against any neediness likely lead us to acknowledge more often the gifts we received.**
3. **Ironically, it may be the very blessings which lead to greater health and better food-security which work against our living constantly in a posture of gratitude.**

V. I recently had a friend extend to me a kindness which cost them something.

A. It was a gift and it was given in love and for me to attempt to pay them for the gift would have sullied the gift and shown that I did not understand the love of the one making the gift.

B. So what am I to do?

1. I can express my thanksgiving for the gift.

2. I can “pay it forward.” — I can learn from the generous love extended to me and I can act generously too.

VI. This past week I was searching my Hard drive using the word, “thanksgiving,” because I was working on today’s message

A. I stumbled upon “Thanksgiving dance”

B. A favorite moment from when our youngest son, Ben was about 6 years old and we were gather on Thanksgiving Day

1. Song on the stereo

2. **Ben dancing with the sort of joy and abandon that only a 6 year-old can manage.**
 3. **I cannot show you this movie because I promised Ben I wouldn't but every time I stumble upon it I smile**
- C. In a way Colossians is inviting us to learn a “thanksgiving dance” and to dance it as if no one is watching.**
1. **We receive gifts and notice that they are *gifts***
 2. **We turn in gratitude to the God from whom all blessings flow**
 3. **We learn from God’s generosity and looks for ways to “pay it forward.”**

VII. As I image most of you know - we are trying to wrap up our fall generosity campaign.

A. Barbara Carew recently shared with me the progress we are making in our “thanksgiving dance”:

- received 122 pledges to date for a total of \$529,679
- our goal is 180+ pledges for a total of \$715,000
- received 74% of our goal and have heard from 68% of expected donors
- please respond - it helps so much with planning
- and, it saves a lot of staff time following up with missing pledges.

B. We have so very much for which to be thankful!

C. I am thankful for you - I know you are also thankful for one another and for me.

- D. I hope that you will join Sarah and me in making a commitment for giving in the new year and in communicating that commitment to us so that the Session can plan prudently for the year ahead.**
 - 1. If you need a pledge card we can get you one**
 - 2. Pledging online through the link in the eLink has never been easier.**

- VIII. I'd like to close with a prayer from my teacher and friend, Walter Brueggeman.**
 - A. It is taken from a collection of his prayers entitled, Awed to heaven, Rooted in Earth.**

We are takers

You are the giver of all good things.

All good things are sent from heaven above,
rain and sun,
day and night,
justice and righteousness,
bread to the eater and
seed to the sower,
peace to the old,
energy to the young,
joy to the babes.

We are takers, who take from you,
day by day, daily bread,
taking all we need as you supply,
taking in gratitude and wonder and joy.

And then taking more,
taking more than we need,
taking more than you give us,
taking from our sisters and brothers,
taking from the poor and the weak,
taking because we are frightened, and so greedy,
taking because we are anxious, and so fearful,
taking because we are driven, and so uncaring.

Give us peace beyond our fear, and so end our greed.

Give us well-being beyond our anxiety, and so end our fear.

Give us abundance beyond our drivenness,
and so end our uncaring.

Turn our taking into giving . . . since we are in your giving image:

Make us giving like you,
giving gladly and not taking,
giving in abundance, not taking,
giving in joy, not taking,
giving as he gave himself up for us all,
giving, never taking. Amen.