

**“The Joy of Your Master”**

Matthew 25:14-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4-5, 8-11; Colossians 3:16-17

This coming Thursday our nation celebrates Thanksgiving. Now for me, this holiday reminds me of some other special occasions that we like to celebrate: like Mothers’ Day, Father’s Day, Valentines Day, Birthdays. WHY? For each of these **calls us to do on one day what we should be doing every day.** Should we REALLY wait for just one single day of the year to tell a parent, or grandparent... a loved one... a friend or family member... just how **special** that they are to us? ... how GLAD we are that they’re in our lives?! In the same way, should we really wait until just one day a year to give thanks to God for the multitude of blessings that He has given us? Is that really an **adequate** way of showing our gratitude to the ‘Giver of all good things’... as we engage in that annual ritual of ‘gorging’ ourselves on ridiculous feasts of food and football? (And as we also prepare ourselves for another ‘famous feast’ called ‘Black Friday’)...

No, it’s not. The fact is that most of us fall FAR short of even coming *close* to the **thankfulness** we should have for all that God has done for us. So, for the next few minutes let us consider just **HOW** we can better say ‘THANKS’ to God for all His goodness... that as we continue to cultivate an ‘attitude of gratitude,’ we can more fully embrace **“the Joy of your Master.”**

I believe that both of our readings from Paul’s letters... to the church at Thessalonica and Colossae... can be seen to speak to ways that we demonstrate to God our thankfulness for his many blessings on our lives. As we have been discussing in our book study, Making Sense of the Bible, Paul’s letters would reflect the **diversity** of the **individual churches** and their **particular situations**. Each one spoke to different needs in the faith community he was addressing. However, the **core values** that lie at the heart of Paul’s teaching would remain **consistent**. Human nurture... the environment in which we grow... may change, but human nature... for better or worse... does NOT change. The challenges that the early church faced, in many ways, are not so different than our own... we BOTH are **Small groups of faithful believers**

facing great challenges to their survival... striving to seek and serve God's will for their lives, both individually, corporately.

First, from the Colossians passage, a way that we can say 'thank you' to God is to ***"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."*** (Colossians 3:16) I HOPE that I don't have to 'sell' you too hard on the value of being in God's Word. And if you find yourself thinking, 'well,so what if I don't spend time reading the Bible?' let me put it to you in this way: Have you ever written someone a note (remember those), or an email, or even a **text**, and the person you were writing to said that they didn't read it? How'd that make you feel? Ignored? Unimportant? Frustrated? Well, the author of *these* messages **[Bible]** feels the same way when you don't read HIS...

Paul then writes to ***"teach and admonish one another in all wisdom."*** (Colossians 3:16) Now, when we think of this word 'teach,' for many of us we might think of it in 'scholastic' terms, as in the tutoring we do at Oak Park or Fairview Elementary. And most certainly, a GREAT way to show your thanks to God for the education that you've received is by helping a young person toward that end. *"Today's readers, tomorrow's leaders."*

But there is also the imparting of wisdom that may not be of 'A book-larning' sense, but rather, 'THE Book-larning' variety. Those ways that you can help someone who is going through a particular struggle with some **Godly advice**. Perhaps literally through a verse of Scripture. Or perhaps, from the spiritual truths that you have gleaned that cannot be quoted 'chapter and verse.' And sometimes, that 'advice' may need to take a stronger emphasis. Sometime the 'truth' one needs to hear 'hurts.' But as long as it is given in the spirit of 'healing'... not 'hurting'... it is beneficial to that person's overall health.

In addition to the personal growth we experience in Bible study, and the guidance we can offer others... and how these both demonstrate our thanks to God for guiding our thoughts and actions... there is a more direct way that we can say 'thank you' to God. ***"With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God."***(Colossians 3:16)God loves to hear you SING! (even if your neighbor does NOT!) I have always believed that God is 'tone deaf!' He doesn't care if you can carry a tune in a bucket. He just wants you to pour it out! I came across this little saying that I SO resonate with:

*“MUSIC speaks what cannot be expressed... soothes the mind and gives it rest.*

*It heals the heart and makes it whole; flows from heaven to the soul.”*

I witnessed some of this truth just this past week. Thursday there was an ecumenical Thanksgiving service in Welsh/right here in this sanctuary. Pastors and parishioners from Methodist, Baptist, Catholic and Presbyterian churches gathered to pray, proclaim God’s Word, and, in good church form, do some *serious* ‘grazing.’ But even more memorable than the delicious spread of food was the SINGING! I believe that if you had taken an ‘exit poll’ of those congregants as to what was the best thing about the event, to a man (or woman) the reply would have been the MUSIC! And not because of some big orchestra, or special instruments (just Mary Ann’s beautiful piano playing!). But because we were ALL singing ‘loud and proud!’ Truly, in ways that mere spoken words could not express, music expresses our love of God in heart, soul, mind, and strength. When God’s people come together to fill the air with singing, we truly ‘enter into the JOY of our Master.’

And the last way that I would lift up from Paul’s letters by which we express our gratitude for God’s providence is in the last verse of the reading from *Thess.*:

***“Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.”*** (1 *Thessalonians 5:11*) And ‘indeed,’ I know... first hand... that many of you *already* do a pretty good job of this! That being said, it IS part of that common human nature to sometimes get caught up in our OWN ‘stuff’ to not be as sensitive to the needs of others. And as I have reminded folks about their concerns about calling on folks in the home, hospital or care facility, the effectiveness of your ‘encouragement’ is NOT based on how articulate you are. People you call on will forget VERY quickly what you said. But they WILL remember that you were THERE! Just remember the ‘holy ratio’...

Sooo, these are just a few examples of HOW we can show our gratitude to God throughout the year: in essence, **STUDY the Word, TEACH the Word, SING the Word, BE the Word!** **Both the Word Written, and the Word made flesh.** But you all knew these already. Perhaps it’s not the ‘how’ that we should be focusing on, but the ‘WHY.’ Isn’t just believing in Christ good enough? WHY do I have to invest all that time in personal devotion and

interpersonal relationships? I come to church and listen to these dang LONG sermons... isn't that *sacrifice enough*?!

Today's Gospel reading from Matthew is known as "The Parable of the Talents." It is the third in a series of parables beginning in the previous chapter that relate to the "Kingdom of heaven." in which Jesus describes the experiences of "two masters and a bridegroom." (like '3 men and a baby?' Or, '2 men and a truck?') ANYWAY, there are common themes throughout the three. In each one, there is a very important person whose arrival is greatly anticipated. Some spend their time waiting wisely. Others do not. They are all reminded that NO ONE knows when that arrival will take place. And those who do NOT use their resources wisely are banished from the celebration of the 'reunion.' NOT to 'the good place.' But rather, they were sent to ***"that place (where) there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."***

In the first two, the foolish ones either mistreated others, or were unprepared. In today's passage, the one who did not act in accordance with his master's will did so out of FEAR. Even though the timid servant was given what his master thought he could handle... ***"according to his ability"***... it was yet a significant resource. A 'talent' would be estimated to be about **3 years wages!** And even though the fearful one admitted to knowing his master to be ***"a harshman,"*** he STILL did nothing with what he was expected to use effectively. DUH!

So what do we have to learn from Jesus' teaching? Do we REALLY want to answer that question? Well, the 'easy' part is that NO ONE knows the day or time when our 'master'... our Lord Jesus Christ... will return. But *when He does*, we will be held to account for the 'talents'... the resources, the abilities... that we've been given. And the question is, will we cower before our Lord because we were too **afraid** to step out in faith and USE what God has given us to HIS glory? Are you and I making the best use of our abilities to **study God's Word... guide others** in how to live by that Word... openly and honestly **sing the praises** of the 'Giver of all good gifts'... be an example of **encouragement, building others up? OR...** Are we 'burying' the talents that God has blessed us with? For the way I read it, these 3 parables could be summed up in a familiar contemporary phrase: *"Use it or lose it."* And I don't just mean physical or financial resources. I mean one's LIFE...

Scary? Perhaps. Particularly if you believe that there IS another 'kingdom to come' besides this earthly one. Gee, I'd sure HOPE so! But God doesn't want us to live in FEAR. But rather, in the FULLNESS of a loving relationship with Him. Each day, give thought to how you are going to grow in that relationship, and help someone else to do so. As you and I continue to seek to USE the talents we've ALL been given, we can rest assured of those words that every faithful follower of God wants to hear: ***"Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your Master."*** And may ALL God's 'faithful servants' say... AMEN!