

# Sermon Text for November 26, 2023

By Guest Minister Rev. Doug Friant

## *And Give Thanks*

### *Scripture: Colossians 3:12-15*

<sup>12</sup> As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

<sup>13</sup> Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

<sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

<sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

I know that you have a lot going on. You have a lot going on as a church- advent starts next week, there is a congregational meeting next Sunday, a family advent night after that, you've just finished a building project- you have a church retreat coming up in the new year, there's the special gifts for Santa's helpers and the food pantry, ...and then there is this news this week that is confusing and worrying ....a lot to keep you busy in body and spirit...and then there is everything else in life

Maybe you still have house guests or maybe a few things to clean up around the house. You had some sort of plans for thanksgiving- and now you have to unpack the bags or put the sheets in the wash, the cooking is done- but the left overs – linger.

Maybe you are at a stage where Family get togethers are simple and fun- or maybe your holiday was more like FAST AND FURIOUS 23- lots of action and drama..

Whatever your Thanksgiving day was like- I can guess that the next few weeks are going to be busy. Modern thanksgiving shouldn't start with fall decorations and holiday parades- it should start with Formula 1 racing and a starter flag.

I don't think you can call thanksgiving the start of the Christmas season anymore- Christmas stuff seems to show up in the stores right after the back to school season...but still Thanksgiving seems to kick off the "Busy Season". Black Friday, Cyber Monday Giving Tuesday- clean the house- shop for the grandkids- visit the family, holiday party go go go. Set up a tree, put out the lights, get together with friends...go go go.

So before life goes from zero to crazy- it is good for us to pause on this Thanksgiving weekend- catch our breath—Gather as God's people- ....and be thankful...and be thankful.

O give thanks to the Lord for God is good, God's steadfast love endures forever. The psalms are full of this refrain- encouraging, entreating, inviting us to GIVE THANKS. The Old Testament in general tells the story of God's involvement in our world- and again and again we are invited to remember what God has done for us- to be mindful of the blessings we have received that we might give thanks to God.

Psalm 107 that used in our call to worship- is just one of the passages that invite us to recount what God has done- and be thankful. The psalm says- Some were scattered here and there- some wandered in the desert- the felt life ebb away and they cried to the Lord...and the Lord satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.  
And be thankful

This morning- with everything going on – and everything about to go on- I've picked a nice simple text from the New Testament- with an O so obvious message that on this thanksgiving weekend, we might hold back the chaos - our hearts might be full of gratitude- and we might be thankful

In the New Testament gratitude rises to a whole new level because we realize that Jew or Greek, slave or free, wealthy and poor, all are offered new life in Christ Jesus. Out of God's free grace- we are loved beyond measure and redeemed beyond cost.

**Our reading from Colossians talks about this new life-**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (One translation says- put on the garment that suits God's people- compassion, kindness, humility... I like that image of wrapping ourselves in these virtues, surrounding ourselves with compassion and humility)

The passage goes on to talk about about being forgiving and then..

<sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts

Clothed in compassion and humility, practicing forgiveness and love with the peace of Christ ruling in our hearts and if that is not enough- the reading ends----- and be thankful  
And be thankful

I really like this passage- it seems to sum up the whole task of Christian life in a few quick verses. It has a lot to say for almost every occasion. Humility, forgiveness. Love peace.

We could use this passage to talk about Christian discipleship- and say- work on all this- be kind, gentle, forgiving, loving....and be thankful

We could talk about a couple learning to live together as husband and wife- and say- put on love which binds everything together in perfect unity.

As we gather on this weekend- we simple say....and be thankful

But I have to admit- this part feels like almost an afterthought. As if we must master Christian living- and master love....and then – Oh by the way- don't forget to GIVE THANKS. We are to Figure out how we are to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, patience – all of that in this harsh- broken world- For good measure- we could throw in a few fruits of the Spirit- **AND THEN be thankful.**

I think that is often how we do thanksgiving- as an afterthought.

As if the text said- as God's chosen people- plan a dinner for 20, and get the house clean, and find a new special thanksgiving recipe, get out the best china, make sure everyone has some drinks- but not too much to drink, plan your shopping for later in the week- maybe get the crew ready for deer camp- ----oh ...and be THANKFUL

DEAR GOD- THANK YOU – AMEN

But *maybe* gratitude is a little more than just saying a thanksgiving prayer- even a heartfelt- but slightly exhausted prayer. We notice in this passage full of virtues or attitudes- that it ends with being thankful. The passage is about a Christ like LIFE- it is not a list of activities but attitudes. **In this passage- the phrase isn't GIVE THANKS- as if we have one more thing to do- but BE thankful.**

Diana Butler Bass- is a Christian author and speaker- she has a book entitled Grateful-The transformative power of giving thanks.

**Gratitude- she says “Gratitude is not about stuff. Gratitude is the emotional response to the surprise of our very existence, to sensing that inner light and realizing the astonishing sacred, social, and scientific events that brought each one of us into being. We cry out like the psalmist, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made!” (Ps. 139:14).”**

A few years back, I attended a conference with Diana Butler Bass- she laid out the body of research on gratitude that suggests that real gratitude is healthy for us- gratitude lowers our

blood pressure, and stress, promotes a healthy immune response to sickness, and helps create a positive outlook that enables people to tackle problems with creativity and grace. Gratitude- is GOOD FOR US. It is more than counting our blessings- it is realizing that we are blessed.

Giving thanks with a grateful heart- is a great thing to do- and it makes a difference in our live and in our communities. We are richer- if we take time- as individuals- as family- and as a nation- to be grateful. We are poorer, we are emptier, - if we don't take time to be thankful.

But giving thanks- is not as simple as it might seem.

### **She makes a distinction between Grateful FOR and Grateful that**

She explains that when we say Grateful FOR we often think of material or specific gifts that have touched us. I'm grateful **for** apple pie, I'm grateful **for** my house, I am grateful **for** family.

However, when we say- I'm grateful **that**- we begin to touch on a gratitude that is not about gifts but attitude- being. I'm grateful that the sun shines its warmth on me, I'm grateful **that** we have such a peaceful and beautiful community, I'm grateful **that** I have more than enough. I AM GRATEFUL

When we say- I'm grateful that- the focus is on what makes our heart sing- and not on the gift or blessing that we have received. **It is not the gift that makes us grateful- it is gratitude- that allows us to see and receive the gift**

Diana Butler Bass also points out that especially in the ancient world but even somewhat today- gratitude is a form of payment.

In the ancient world- most people were poor. A few people were wealthy or powerful enough to be patrons- at the top of the Roman world was the emperor- who was the chief patron of all- they could give money or favors to others. If a wealthy neighbor invited you to a wedding, there was nothing you could do to pay them back...except to be publicly grateful. Praise them – thank them- tell everyone what a great person they are..... **what do we say- PAY THEM A COMPLIMENT**

Such praise becomes expected- it was a quid pro quo- a favor for a favor. Someone gives us something- and we **GIVE THANKS**

Gratitude in the ancient world was about returning a favor for a favor.

But Jesus was about Pro- Bono- for Free. He talked about not seeking honor and praise but doing things in secret.

Gratitude for Jesus was an awareness that all this is from God

Gratitude for Jesus was not about debt or duty or obligation- it was unrequired- unrestrained joyful thankfulness. Our text today does not say- give thanks but BE THANKFUL....and be thankful

The difference between gratitude as a free expression and gratitude as an obligation is a small thing,, but it is interesting the way that it shows up in our world.

A politician might complain that we should stop helping another country because they don't seem very grateful- they don't appreciate what we do for them.

A grandmother complains that her grandchildren don't write thank you notes. Even though they all called to say thanks.

A church member complains about a family they helped last Christmas- they just didn't seem to appreciate all that we did for them last year.

Quid pro Quo- a favor for a favor.

I'll give you this- but I want to feel good about what I've done. I want to be truly appreciated.

When we give to people- we expect that others appreciate what we have given to them- but in church we often also expect that our gift will be life changing. Here's some money- now- go make something of yourself, here's some food- let's not see you back here again. Here's a bible- join our church.

We feel these strange gift giving dynamics- when we are on the receiving end as well and it is hard for some of us to accept gifts. Whether the gift is big or small- whether it is essential to us- or just nice- it can be hard to just receive it and say thank you.

We often feel that we need to respond in some way- pay them back- in some small way. To buy them a gift or send them a card or offer to help them with some task.

A pastor friend of mine had his church do a free yard sale. People brought in nice things that they no longer wanted, the church picked a Saturday and advertised- and then gave everything away. No charge.

They explained to people that it was an exercise in God's grace- freely they had received- and so freely they should give. They didn't expect people to join their church or get on the mailing list. God had freely given to them- and so- they were giving things away.

But most people were very uncomfortable with the idea.

In society- there is an implicit debt if you receive a gift...a debt that has to be satisfied with some response. ...and so people said- how about if I give you a donation. Some people went home and got something that they could exchange.

I'll buy your lamp for free- but here is a barbie beach house.

Some of us have a hard time with gifts- we don't want to be indebted- and maybe – we are not sure that people (or God ) would really give something for free.

Free – gratis- nothing needed in response- pro bono- for free

**My friends, freely we have received- and so freely we ought to give. AND BE THANKFUL**

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This is a crazy season...holiday treats to make, gifts to buy for the kids and the co-workers

Don't forget-this this this...

Put on the garment of compassion, kindness patience, let us clothe ourselves in love... and **be** thankful