

Worship at home
September 27, 2020

Sermon series: “Gratitude: More than an Attitude”

Call to worship: Psalm 90:1, 2; 95:6, 7

Prayers of praise, confession, and supplication:

Great and gracious God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit;
you are the alpha and the omega,
the beginning and the end.
In you we live, move, and have our being.

Far too often we struggle to accept and trust
the implications of that statement.
We are frequently overcome with fear;
we are frequently mired in the mundane;
we are frequently focused only on our budgets,
our next purchase,
and the price of food.
Far too often we allow the lingering effects of sin
to control our reactions,
our thoughts, and
our behaviours.

Meet us during this time of worship.
Surprise us with your grace.
Remind us of your mercy.
And encourage us to find our identity not in temples and ritual,
but in our name which you gave and which was once hurled as an insult: Christian.
Little Christs.

For the sake of your glory,
and in the name of our Lord Jesus, the Christ.
Amen.

Assurance of pardon:

While it is true that we have sinned,
it is a greater truth that we are forgiven
by the sacrifice of Jesus, the Christ.
To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say,
in Jesus Christ, your sin is forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

Hymn #434 “For the beauty of the earth”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFz3uQbImnw> (different version than hymnal)

Scripture and sermon: 1 Corinthians 14:12-19

Thanksgiving as Testimony

Earlier this week as I was walking my dog, Knox, someone passed me walking in the other direction. As they walked by, they commented on the beauty of the morning. I responded with an affirmative “yes, it is.” I then began to reflect on that statement and, in the privacy of my mind, gave thanks to the Lord for sharing some of his beauty with us. I gave thanks for the sight of the leaves just beginning to change; for the pre-fall coolness I felt touching my arms; for the fresh smell of the air; for the sound of the birds in the trees. As I savoured the goodness of God’s creative grace and silently gave thanks, my soul was encouraged in the moment.

When the apostle Paul wrote what we just read, he was addressing a particular concern he had about the worship practices of the Christians in the ancient city of Corinth. Their worship services were chaotic.

In Presbyterian circles we often joke of our pride in doing all things “decently and in order.” The reason for this desire comes largely from this chapter of God’s Word to his people. Paul used those very words in the last verse of Chapter 14: “but all things should be done decently and in order.”

The worship of the Corinthian congregations was hardly orderly. Their sharing of the Lord’s Supper was a drunken display of gluttony for some and a hunger-panged envy for others. Whenever someone caught the whiff of a praise chorus, they would stand up and start singing. People gave lessons on the scriptures or testimony whenever they felt so moved. In the absence of structure this could go on until everyone had said their piece!

And, they spoke in tongues.

Speaking in tongues is a particular manifestation of the worshiper’s submission to the Holy Spirit. The worshiper speaks out loud, but the sounds they make do not belong to any human language. This is very different from the church at Pentecost when the disciples began speaking different languages. Then it was so everyone could clearly understand the gospel regardless of ethnic differences. Here, speaking in tongues is a private language of prayer between the worshiper and God.

The apostle affirmed the validity of speaking in tongues; however, just as it is inappropriate to carry on a private conversation via text messaging at the dinner table, speaking in tongues is not always appropriate during congregated worship.

It can be a great blessing for the individual worshiper. Yet, it does little to build up the faith of others in the room.

Your private text conversation might be enlightening for you, yet it does nothing to enhance the dinner experience of everyone else gathered around the table!

As I was giving thanks to the Lord in that moment of grace when I was reassured in the privacy of my heart and mind that God is real, God is good, and God is able, it occurred to me that the other traveler (who, naturally, lived outside my thoughts) wasn't able to say "Amen" to my thanksgiving because they didn't know what I was saying in my private prayer language.

Giving thanks to the Lord in a way that other people hear *and understand* benefits you (clarifying your own feelings of gratitude helps you focus on God's specific grace in specific moments) *and* can build up the faith of someone else.

In this passage, Paul focused on two nouns and a verb.

The first noun is "spirit." This comes from the Greek word *pneuma* (from which we get pneumatic) which means wind. It also means breath. And, in the Hebrew, it also means soul. It refers to the undefinable aspect of our personhood by which we perceive and feel; it gives us our conscience, and our intuition.

The second noun is "mind." This comes from the Greek word *nous* (pronounced "nooce".) This is the reason or the intellect; the seat of understanding. It refers to the aspect of our being that allows us to take the emotional experiences and the intuitive knowledge gained by our spirit and dissect, itemize, and clarify those perceptions.

Our spirit, rightly trained and oriented, helps us perceive goodness for which we feel gratitude.

Our mind helps us understand and clarify that perceived goodness.

So that we can then name our perceptions and emotions and give expression to our thoughts in audible, clearly reasoned, and intelligible language.

Thence the verb: to speak.

“I will pray with the **spirit** and I will pray with the **mind** so that when I say a blessing those who live outside of my thoughts can add their ‘Amen’ to my thanksgiving.”

Giving thanks to the Lord is a holistic, embodied experience. It employs spirit, mind, and voice; heart, head, and hands.

Where have you heard that bodily trinity before?

It is a foundational marker of a disciple of Jesus Christ. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind”; or, with all your body, mind, and soul; or, spirit, mind, and voice. While the words might be slightly different depending on translations, the message is the same: Love the Lord your God with everything that makes you, you: your heart, your mind, and your body. And, as Jesus continued, “a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37ff.)

Doesn’t love of neighbour include the desire that they too know and live out of the assurance that God is real, God is good, and God is able?

Doesn’t the call to be a light on a lampstand giving light to all in the house (Matthew 5:15) involve testifying that what Jesus did for us on the cross and by the empty tomb, inaugurating the rule of heaven on earth, is forever? Even in the midst of (or, perhaps in spite of), war, famine, drought, flood, and pandemic?

Giving thanks to the Lord employs the heart, head, and hands and invites others to join their thank offerings with ours.

But, reasoned Paul, how can anyone say “Amen” to your thanksgiving if they don’t know what you’re saying in the privacy of your own heart and mind?

So, disciples of Jesus devote themselves to learning to see the presence of God’s kingdom through the eyes of faith, learning to understand what it means that God’s kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven, and learning to put those thoughts into words and songs.

In prayer and praise we can learn to **cultivate** our spiritual awareness of God’s benevolence and action. This includes and goes beyond simply counting the nice times. It’s learning to see the active and able presence of the good God we know in Jesus even when fear, or sickness, or grief, or loneliness loom nearby.

In thoughtful meditation we can engage our reasoning minds to **clarify** the goodness of which we are becoming more aware.

Every Sunday we hear, in different ways, the assurance that by the sacrifice Jesus made of himself on the cross, God has forgiven sin. And we respond to the announcement with four little words: “Thanks be to God.”

Someone in the position of an outsider might reasonably ask why you are grateful at this proclamation.

Could you answer them clearly and concisely?

Why does it matter that God forgives sin?

The answer begins with the belief that God is real; that God is living (not a mere idea); that God is sovereign; and that God is good. With that foundation comes the realization that peace in our souls and peace in society can only be accomplished when we have peace with God. By Jesus’ sacrifice, we have peace with God.

In prayer and praise we **cultivate** the awareness of the grace of God and the presence of his kingdom on earth through Jesus Christ. By thoughtful reflection and meditation on our experiences and the Word of God, we **clarify** our gratitude.

And, when disciples of the Messiah meet others as we walk through our daily journeys, we **communicate** in audible, reasoned, and intelligible language our gratitude to the Lord. For the benefit of your own soul. For the faith of others. And for the glory of God.

I thank the Lord that, in the few years in which I’ve been in the ministry, I have been blessed to get to know, and honoured to conduct the funerals of a few people who seemed to have been better able than I to **cultivate**, **clarify**, and **communicate** their awareness of God’s grace and God’s kingdom over decades of living through war and famine, migration and illness. Each time I’d visit, I’d leave reassured that God is real, God is good, and God is able.

I could say “Amen” because they didn’t keep their thanksgiving to themselves. Their gratitude was more than an attitude. It shaped their thoughts and salted their speech. It was specific. It always credited the Lord. And it assured me of the certain hope of the promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

Great and gracious God,
the stresses and the worries of living in the shadow of so much
that seeks to destroy your good creation
are continuously with us.

We worry about the health of the planet,
and the implications for the future of our mishandled stewardship now and in the past.
We worry about our own health.
We worry about the health of others.
We worry about the education and well-being of our children.
And, we worry about the coronavirus that continues to plague this global village.

Indeed, at times we do more than worry.
We lament.
We long for the days when we could fearlessly enter a store.
For days when we didn't, on some subconscious level, even if not expressed,
wonder if the person approaching us might unknowingly be breathing out a virus.
For the time when we could shake a stranger's hand,
pat a friend on the back,
and hug our neighbour.

Then we remember when you wept at the grave of your friend,
when you prayed tears of blood in the garden,
when you hung, forsaken on that cross.
We remember when the women went to the tomb,
and found it empty.
When you stood on the beach,
and invited us to breakfast.
When you breathed your spirit into our souls,
and said: "As the Father sent me, so I send you."
And we give you thanks.
We give you thanks for your compassion,
that causes your Spirit to groan along with all of creation.
We give you thanks for your steadfast love,
that invites us to walk under the easy burden of your yoke of grace.

And we give you thanks for the moments of grace
we've experienced over the past months:

- for meaningful connections and relationships made during purposeful, mask-making work,
- for moments of laughter and the deep joy of watching the laughter of children and grandchildren,
- for technology that allows us to connect and support friends and family at a distance,
- for the generosity of strangers to travelers,
- for the human senses that trigger memories of your past grace,

- for people who are able and care enough to provide and deliver food,
- for deliverance from the darkness of depression in unexpected ways,
- for leaders who co-operate and listen to medical experts while working for the common good,
- for the safe reunion of family members separated by closed borders,
- for the community-minded volunteers of Captain Kidd Days and the donors who produced an abundant harvest for our local foodbanks, local organizations for mental health in children and youth, and local athletics despite COVID restrictions,

These things we pray in the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.

Hymn #663 “God, whose giving knows no ending”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSrYxe7_aqU&t=62s

Charge and Blessing:

As God’s chosen ones,

holy and beloved,

let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,

and be thankful.

And may the Lord bless you and keep you;

the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,

and give you peace.

Amen.