

Thanks Living! (October 9th, 2016)

Luke 17:11-19. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Everyone knows how important it is to say “Thank you.” We are reminded to say “thank you” since we are children. There are countless books written about it. I’ve pulled a few famous quotes about “Thank you” off the internet for you:

(Poet) William Wordsworth : “Rest and be thankful.”

(author) Maya Angelou: “Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer.”

(TV Celebratory) Oprah Winfrey: “Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never, ever have enough”

(Actress) Marilyn Monroe: “Always remember to smile and look up at what you got in life.”

(Former US president) John F. Kennedy: “We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives.”

(Theologian) **Karl Barth**: “Joy is the simplest form of gratitude

Buddha: “Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn’t learn a lot today, at least we learned a little”

And one of my favorites, are the words of ...

A.A. Milne, and Winnie-the-Pooh: “Piglet noticed that even though he had a Very Small Heart, it could hold a rather large amount of Gratitude.”

But what does the Bible say about thanks? In Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, he reminds them that they should

“Be joyful always” and “give thanks in all circumstances.”

I want to share with you a story that reminds us to ALWAYS give thanks! It takes place in a faraway land, long ago, in a small fishing village. In this village lived four men. One was lame, one was bald, one was blind, and one was very, very poor. Each day you would see the four men, sitting at the shore, and complaining to each other about how hard life was for each of them.

Then, one day a visitor came to this village. He came from a long distance to the village, and people didn’t know the visitor. In fact, if truth be told, the visitor was an angel in disguise. When he arrived in the village he greeted the four men sitting at the shore.

“Greetings” he said, and the four men looked from one to another, and then back to the heavenly visitor.

“Greetings,” they replied. The angel then asked each man the same question:

“Tell me, what do you want more than anything else in the world?”

The lame man spoke up first. Without any hesitation he said, "My legs! I want to be able to walk again!" And the blind man quickly added, "And I want to see again! I want my eyesight!" The bald man placed his hands on his shiny baldhead, and said "My hair, I would love to have hair again!" (maybe some of you know how that feels?) And the very, very poor man said with yearning in his voice, "I just want enough money to buy food and clothes for my family."

"Very well" said the heavenly visitor, "It is as you want it."

Well, the lame man immediately leapt up from his mat and began dancing around like a young calf that had just been released from its stall on a beautiful spring morning. "My legs, my legs, I have my legs," he said as he cried with joy.

The blind man was sight to behold. His eyes were opened wide, and gazed in silence at the wonder of all that was around him. All the beautiful colors and images that he had never seen before.

The bald man could hardly believe it. He placed his hands on his head and there was hair "Beautiful hair, so beautiful..." he said in a quivering voice.

And the very, very poor man had a great big bag of money sitting in front of him.

"Thank you. Oh thank you," they all exclaimed. "We will never forget your kindness to us."

Well, a long time passed, and our heavenly visitor thought to himself that it had been a long time since he had visited the village. He wondered how his thankful friends were doing, so the angel decided to visit them again. It was a long journey back to the village, and when the visitor arrived on the outskirts, he was hot, tired and thirsty. The first man, who had been lame, saw the visitor coming in the distance and immediately recognized who he was. The man quickly ran behind a rock, and glared out at the approaching traveler. "I suppose he is coming to ask for money or something like that just because he did me a favor. Well, he's not going to get one penny from me!" And he stepped out from behind the rock and said, "What do you want?" The angel looked at him and said, "Greetings, I've come to ask how are your legs?"

"My legs? My legs?" replied that man who had been lame. "Well they are not much better than they had been before," he lied. "They are sore, and they ache from standing all day. And now that I can walk I have to buy shoes that keep wearing out."

"I see," said the angel. "Well I guess there was no point in really fixing them" And the angel snapped his fingers and the man was lame once again.

The angel walked to the home of the second man. The man who had been blind. The man was looking out of his window and saw the heavenly visitor approach. He leaned against the wall of his house and selfishly said, "I bet he wants me to return a favor just because he helped me. I'm not going to do it." The angel knocked on the door three times. The man opened the door and said, "Oh, it's you!"

"Greetings," said the angel.

"What do you want," replied the man.

"I've come to see ask how you like your eyesight?"

“Well, now that I can see,” complained the man, “people don’t do things for me anymore like they used to. I have to do everything myself. It’s terrible!”

“I understand” said the angel, and he snapped his fingers, and the man was lost to darkness again.

The attitude of the third man was not much better than the first two. The angel knocked on the door. When the door opened there stood the man who had been bald. “Greetings,” said the tired angel, but the man just sneered at the angel.

“What have you come for?”

“I’ve come to ask how you like your hair?”

“Hair!” The man spat out the word. “Hair really isn’t what it’s cracked up to be! You have to wash it, comb it, cut it. It really is just too much work! A real nuisance.”

“I see,” said the angel, and snapping his fingers, the man was bald once more.

By this time the weary worn traveler could hardly make his way to the home of the last man. When he arrived he saw a beautiful home, that had well-tended gardens. In the yard there played some children who looked healthy and strong. They were well dressed. The angel hesitantly made his way up to the door and knocked three times. The door opened.

“Greetings,” said the man who had once been very, very poor. He didn’t recognize the heavenly visitor. The angel returned the greeting and said,

“I have come from a faraway land, and I have traveled a long time. I’m thirsty and tired. May I have a drink of water?”

“Come in, come in,” said the man. “not only may you have a drink of water, but you must stay and dine with me too!” And he welcomed the stranger into his house. He fed him, gave him fine wine, and treated him as his guest, not once recognizing who he was.

After they had feasted, and rested for a while, the angel asked the man,

“Why have you been so gracious and kind to me, a stranger?”

“Well,” said the man who had once been very, very poor, “you may not know it now, but a long time ago I used to be very, very poor, and then one day a stranger came to our village and helped me. Ever since that time, I have had a roof over my head, and plenty of food to feed my children, and fine clothes in which to dress them. To show my gratitude, I gladly share what I have with others.”

“And because you do,” replied the angel, “your blessings will continue.”

(SING SONG – Give thanks with a Grateful Heart)

“Be joyful always” and “give thanks in all circumstance.”

There is a common saying that we only appreciate something when we don’t have it, or when it’s not working right, or when it’s hurt or broken. How often do you think about your ears, or your eyes, or your legs? Does your awareness of their role in your life increase after you spend time with a person who is deaf, or blind, or who needs a wheelchair to get around? And how often do you appreciate

electricity? Or plumbing? Or cars? Or do we wait for those things to be broken before we remember to be grateful for them?

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At this special time of the year we are reminded that we have so much to be thankful for. We see the color of the leaves changing, we smell the fresh fall scent on the air, we gather harvests from the fields. And we celebrate with family and friends around roast turkey dinners. Like the early pilgrims, we know that we have so much to be grateful for. At church we sing songs of gratitude and praise to God.

But what about those other times of the year? The times when we are in pain; the times when we struggle financially or emotionally; the times when the trials and concerns in our lives seem so huge. Do we remember to be thankful in those times? Paul’s words to the Thessalonians are words for us too –

“Be joyful always” and “give thanks in all circumstances.”

I encourage you this Thanksgiving to give thanks; not just when things seem good, but always. Live your life in a way of Thanks- living. Not just for one weekend, but every day, all year. Search out the goodness in everything and every day. Start making a list as you go through your day for all the little things to be grateful for. I promise you that when you live a life of ‘Thanks-living’ then you will always see the goodness in the midst of all the ups and downs of life. Just give God thanks in all circumstances. It’s just that simple.

“Be joyful always” and “give thanks in all circumstances.”