

Text: Acts 2:42-47

Title: Giving and Gratitude = Thanksgiving

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

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Thanksgiving is a unique holiday-- an annual religious celebration on the secular calendar. The 1st Thanksgiving originated from Christians setting aside a day to thank God in the midst of their dire circumstances. The official holiday was established by a Christian president for the sole purpose of thanking God. It is surprising that the ACLU has not already sought to eradicate Thanksgiving because of the overt spiritual roots, like they are with Xmas.

For the Christian an attitude of thankfulness is a basic faith principle...We live in a state of gratitude for His salvation, for His daily interaction, even in our struggles--we are thankful for His presence & our hope for eternity. It's a long list of thank you's. Thanking God is a fundamental part of being a Christian and should saturate your prayer life.

The fact that Thanksgiving is a Christian event that has caught the nation's attention is similar to what happened 2,000 years ago in Acts 2. When the believers, who out of their gratitude for God's grace, took care of others in need--the world took notice. These Christians are different from us, they have a different attitude & approach to life. They have something we don't have.

Yet in spite of the attractive nature of Christianity there is a frightening component, this kind of selflessness goes against the grain of worldly wisdom --look out for #1. People steer clear of this selfless lifestyle because who knows where it will lead.

Still, a magnetism toward Christianity remains--the real stuff. The lifestyle of caring for others; when we invest our time, energy & resources into alleviating the problems and lost-ness of others. Many folks claim to be Christians, but you wouldn't know it if they hadn't told you. However when we live caring for others needs--there's no doubt that person is a Christ follower. This is Spirit filled living. When Jesus gets into our system and we become God centered--other centered--need centered: the core of our lives shifts from self centeredness (the original sin magnification of self).

The mystery is you never know when the Spirit is going to rest upon someone. For some it occurs at the beginning of the faith journey. For others it happens after experiencing a tragedy and have re-evaluated our existence & decided to take God & eternity seriously.

Still others get zapped in the course of the normal every day. It might happen during the worship service, in a hymn or the liturgy, possibly a sermon. It occurs when we decide to be vulnerable & let God into our hearts beyond the mere mental acknowledgment that God exists.

But you know when it happens--because all of a sudden you start seeing life differently. There comes an irresistible urge to make a difference in others lives....our heart beats after God's desires. Like

Zaccheus, when he met Jesus everything changed, suddenly the presence of God inspired concern for the poor.

I heard about this change occurring in a well to do man, as he was sitting in church which was his normal routine. Somewhere in the service on one nameless day God got into him. He changed his extra curricular's and started doing ministry in the Attica prison with 3 inmates at a time watching God transform their lives. Then he saw a problem with migrant workers and decided to find a way to provide housing for their families. Then his life was given to troubled teens.

When asked about his change of lifestyle from one of being self oriented to giving himself away--he said, I didn't know what I was missing, but now the Lord is at work through everything I do.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon us it enables us to live with a kind of reckless abandon, freely you have received freely give.

It's life knowing Christ will open doors & provide what we need, so we can live not counting the cost, but trusting all these things will be added unto you. It's a deeper life with an ultimate purpose.

The spiritual gifts God gives to us are for the purpose of blessings others, which is our primary way of giving to God. Whenever you did it unto the least/I John 4:20 the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

I was talking to someone about our thanksgiving baskets and they stated it was a band aid for meeting the needs of the poor, but it is a good exercise for us as it keeps us in the habit of giving to others and makes us more aware of the needs of others. It is a tangible way of saying thank you to God for the abundance we enjoy.

One year we were giving away canned food, and I noticed my wife was loading up the bag with all the items I liked to eat!

When the Holy Spirit arrives within we become other centered—notice in Acts they held all things in common. This doesn't mean they got rid of all their private property.

The early church met in private residences. But what they did was make what they had--available to all. My driver in Rome—no house rather a commune for Christian to live in...no \$ goes to ministry...

Peter & John in Acts 3 come across a man at the doorway of the temple who was crippled from birth. He survived on the charity of others. He asked the two disciples for \$. Neither of them have their wallet. They say silver & gold we do not have, but we'll give you what we do have—the name & power of Jesus—Stand up & walk!

The Spirit gives us power & gifts for the sake of others. The story is told of a pope sitting in front of vast sums of \$ says to St. Francis no longer can the church say silver & gold we do not have. St Francis replied, Neither can the church say get up & walk

We are supposed to live in a way that is counter culture. Before the pilgrims landed in this country the native people had a tradition of circulating the peace pipe among the local tribes. It would stay in a certain place for a time & then it would be given away among the people. Then the English came & were invited to share the sacred pipe which they were expected to have for a time & then give away. The leading settler took the pipe, placed it on his mantle & there it stayed & stayed. Finally some of the natives came & it was apparent they expected something—a translator explained they should be offered a smoke & then give them the pipe. The Englishman was disgruntled, clearly these “Indians did not understand private property—thus the term Indian giver was coined.

It is our calling to share what we have. This is a manifestation of Christ’s Spirit. It is not enough to pray for others and wish them well. James 2:16 points out we are to do something about the plight of those struggling in life. If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food and one of you says to them be warmed and be filled and you do not give them what is necessary for their body what use is that? Our faith requires works

Sharing with the poor was what stunned the 1st century world. Barnabas sold a piece of property to bless others. Imagine the conversation at the town square did you hear what those Christians do? They sell their stuff to meet one another’s needs. They fast so that they can feed others...

This upcoming Friday is Black Friday the day that most defines American Capitalism! We’ll be looking for Xmas presents. It is difficult in our society to find gifts for the person who has everything they already want. Sometimes what’s needed is intangible.

In the story of the Ten Lepers Jesus heals. Only one of them returns to say thank you-- the other 9 were content with the physical blessing. But they missed the deeper gift of spiritual & emotional wholeness that Christ had to give... blessings that are only received through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

Maybe this holiday we need to give the Lord a gift?! Allowing God access to our lives & changing our priorities...walking in the Spirit opens our eyes to see what others need & start a friendship w God

One day Ghandi was boarding a train & as it was pulling out he stumbled and lost his shoe which fell down by the track. Since the train was moving it was too late to retrieve his shoe, so he takes off the other shoe and throws it down on the tracks below. His traveling companions ask Ghandi what could you possibly be doing? A poor person will come along the railroad tracks someone with no shoes and the poor beggar will find a shoe and then be delighted to find its match. He thought in terms of human need.

It didn’t register in their minds nor does it in ours, we think of our daily walk in self centered terms. If we lost a shoe on a trip we’d be steaming what am I going to do with one shoe?! Ghandi immediately thought in terms of the other.

We have a unique holiday set aside by the Christians who have gone before us; in extreme pain and poverty who nevertheless, set aside a day to thank God. Let’s take a personal moment right now to

thank God for five things that the Lord has given or done for you...five items like the Pilgrims who only had five kernels of corn.

The real secret of human joy is sharing what we have with others. Rather than hoarding it all to ourselves. We're not talking about taking on a new set of habits...we are talking about what happens when the Holy Spirit resides within us. & He starts to give Himself away through us!

One last thought about the original Thanksgiving. We all know that the Pilgrims came over searching for religious freedom. The church of England was throwing them into prison for worshipping in their own way. So they moved to Holland where they were free to worship as they wished. However, their teenagers were losing their faith, being influenced by the licentiousness of the youth in that country—saloons and sexual promiscuity.

The pilgrims already had religious freedom in Holland. The pilgrims embarked on the dangerous journey to an unexplored country for the sake of their children. Thanksgiving has inherent within it a responsibility to care for the spiritual wellbeing of others. So be a catalyst for faith conversation at the table this holiday!

Let's do a real Thanksgiving