

Thanksgiving: November 25/26, 2015

“Generous God”

Philippians 2:5-6

Twitter feeds this morning, responding to the question, “What are you thankful for this year?”

- I am thankful for my freedom to pray to my God.
- My aunt received a new heart, thanks to a donor and the miracle of science. I love her so much.
- I am thankful I am still here to celebrate, with a roof over my head, food in the pantry and friends at the table.
- I am grateful for life in general, and pumpkin pie.



No human counsel has devised nor has any mortal hand worked out the great things [of] the year that is drawing towards its close. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, has nevertheless remembered mercy. –Abraham Lincoln. Remarkably graceful words from a man who had already lost two children to childhood diseases, who was in the throes of the bloody Civil War, and who had just endured the horrific outcome of the battle of Gettysburg, when nearly one-third of the total forces engaged—some 50,000—became casualties. “The Almighty God has remembered mercy.” Well said, Mr. Lincoln, even in the midst of such suffering.

It should be easier for us in our day to be thankful. War is not being fought on our soil and our engagements overseas are limited. Unemployment is down to pre-recession levels and inflation is almost non-existent. Gasoline is below \$2 a gallon nationally and below \$1.70 locally. Food is plentiful as will be attested to by our Thanksgiving meals. We are thankful. But not too much. Because there are other realities in our lives that compete, perhaps even overwhelm



thankfulness.

Work is hard. There is a reason why we call it a “four-



letter” word.

Family crises abound, be they marital strife, abusive



relationships, adolescent rebellion, or crushing debt. Job security is a thing of the past and retirement savings are insufficient and depleting. So yes, we are thankful this Thanksgiving, but we just can't shake the feeling that life would be better if only... If only I had a better boss, if only my spouse were not so controlling, if only I would win the lottery, if only... I guess if truth be told, I'm not too very thankful.

If we are thankful...to an extent, Jesus is generous...to a fault. Paul states it succinctly:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. (Philippians 2:5-6).

In this—understanding Jesus' attitude toward privilege—lies the *beginning* of thankfulness.



Jesus enjoys all the glory of God being very God of very God. Yet he simply refused to use it to his advantage. We have trouble with this concept. We know someone important and we love to drop the name. We hold an office of significance and we waste no effort in making it known. We benefit from the trappings of success and love to display it. I earned it. I deserve it. If thanks are to be offered, I'm thankful that *I* worked so hard to achieve what *I* have.



Jesus offers a better way. He enjoyed equality with God in every way, yet he chose to exercise it in no way. There is no more vulnerable condition than infancy. If he was intent upon entering his creation, he most certainly could have come with the full faculties of adulthood. He chose conception and gestation, labor and delivery, diapers and nursing. And he did so freely.



The disciples got a glimpse of his glory at the Transfiguration when he exuded a radiance brighter than the sun. Jesus is the bright morning star of heaven who

receives the praise of angels and archangels. Yet he gloried in serving and not being served. And he did so freely.



“Do you [disciples] think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” Yet Jesus never made the appeal. In place of angels he chose nails. And he did so freely. So this was Jesus’ attitude toward privilege. He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. In this lies the *beginning* of thankfulness.

Jesus did what I could not do. He went where I could not go. He paid a debt I could not pay. He rose from a death that enslaved me to fear. I want to be thankful, and I *am* thankful that Jesus freely gave up all things to reclaim me. But I need help now. I need a change of attitude. I want to be thankful in *all things*. The Good News is that we *can* be thankful, because we have a *Generous God*.

St. Paul explains how this can be:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom. 8:32).



So ten lepers spy Jesus going into a nearby village and they seize the opportunity. They have heard of this itinerant miracle worker. “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” They need more than pity. They are outcasts, beggars, suffering from any number of skin diseases that potentially disfigure, blind, and deform them. They need more than pity, and Jesus gives them more than sympathy. Perhaps they thought he might provide food, even a better form of shelter than the caves and hovels that they occupied. Jesus does so much more, and he does



so without hesitation.

“Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went they were cleansed.” *The lepers* were understandably ecstatic. *We* are amazed. Yet we should not be. “He who did not spare his own Son, how will he not also with him graciously give us *all things*?” Jesus did the heavy lifting on the cross. All other things? He is a *Generous God* who delights in showing mercy, who promises “all things”. In this lies the *reason*

for thankfulness.

Which brings us to the crux of the miracle and the choice that Thanksgiving demands.



How do you respond to “God will give you all things”? Faith compels us to trust the faithfulness of God. So we acknowledge that we have been given “all things.” Certainly all things needful, which is God’s intent. The response of the lepers highlights the choice that Thanksgiving demands. All ten were healed. Yet what was top of mind for *nine* when they discovered they were healed? Why, where will I stay? What work can I find? I need food tonight. How can I get on with my life? In a word, in the midst of the cares of living they missed the gift of life. As the plaque in our home states succinctly, “I prayed for all things that I might enjoy life. God gave me *life* that I might enjoy all things.” So the nine looked Life in the face and failed to recognize it, or more properly...Him. Yet there was one who received the very same miracle but who responded in a completely different way. His response? Wow! God is good! If he will handle the big things of my life, I guess I can trust him in all things. “And he returned, praising God in a loud voice, and threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.” Same miracle. Totally different response.



Thanksgiving 2015: *You are more blessed than you can possibly imagine.* I don’t diminish the fact that we all have cares, some very great cares that defy resolution. Leprosy defied resolution. Yet Jesus healed. And Jesus continues to heal and restore all the time. That’s not the issue. The issue is the choice that Thanksgiving demands—How do you respond to our *Generous God*?



We thank God for his adoption of us as his sons and daughters. This new birthright opens our eyes to see that he, indeed, graciously gives us all things. There will always be distractions that seek to take our eyes off our *Generous God* and focus them on our dissatisfactions. Focusing on our deficits produces worry and insecurity. Focusing on Jesus produces peace and satisfaction. He took care of the *big* things at the cross. He will take care of all the rest in your life. Such faith as this is proper preparation for genuine Thanksgiving. So, *rise and go; your faith has made you well.* Amen.