

Gratefulness leads to Thankfulness

As we celebrate Thanksgiving and enter into a new church year there is so much to be thankful for. The beautiful season that allowed the harvest to be brought in; the ability to celebrate family and friends throughout this past year; celebrating new lives brought into the community of God through Baptism; remembering those who have passed knowing that they will be with the Lord when He returns; but most of all knowing that God loves you and I so much that He gave up everything for us in His only Son, Jesus Christ.

In 1 John 4: 10 we can see the unconditional love that God has for us in these words: ***“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation of our sins.”*** You see our God who created us wants nothing more than for humanity to love Him back. How do we love a God who has sacrificed His one and only Son for our lives? First of all I know that love begins with faith and trust. A faith we cannot make for ourselves but know faith, being a gift from God through the Holy Spirit, allows us to be grateful every day for what we have and what we are able to give. With this faith, given to us through the Spirit, we are able to repent, confess, and respond to our Lord with grateful hearts.

I believe it is somewhat easier to reflect on this time of the season because of the holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas. There are decorations that get put up, families are renewed as they come together for turkey and all the trimmings, sporting events occur and take up a large part of our time, and as the Christmas lights are put up and out in yards and upon houses this time of the year often becomes a commercialized feel good time of year. Our focus becomes about fixing meals, buying presents, and spending time with family. Which is all very good, however, as this time of the year fast approaches how often do we take time out of our busy schedules to be grateful for the only thing that matters to us as Christians.

It isn't about all the food we enjoy, it isn't about the football games that are played, it isn't about shopping on Black Friday in order to see what fantastic deals we can get. No. It's about a Creator God who loves you and me. A God who blesses us every day with all that we need to live. Who desires to have your full allegiance to Him knowing we will spend eternity with Him.

The apostle Peter wrote some words as he was inspired by the Spirit that tell us how God feels about us and what His will and desire are for us. 1 Peter 1: 3 – 9 says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

You see brothers and sisters in Christ, it is all wonderful to be blessed with an abundance of things to be grateful for, however, when gratefulness becomes the central point of how we feel toward our lives, thankfulness becomes the only word we can use to describe our response to our Creator, Savior, and Sanctifier, as we celebrate the wonderful holidays at this time of the year.

So, when you are gathered around a household of family and friends ready to celebrate the holidays, look around and thank God for how He has blessed you and your family. When you are out shopping, maybe on Black Friday and days before Christmas, look around and see if you are reminded what it means to truly be thankful. Thankfulness is a state of the heart and it reflects the gratitude we all have for being a child of the Living Lord and Savior – Jesus Christ and what He gave to you and me – ***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”***

May you experience the love of Jesus during this Christmas and may you be grateful and thankful for that great love He continues to bless you with each and every day.

In Christ's Service and Love, Pastor Rich