

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Thanksgiving Service
142 Anniversary Celebration
November 21, 2021
Scripture: Psalm 100

Sermon: What are you thankful for?

Once upon a time, there was a great famine. The people in one small village didn't have enough to eat and definitely not enough to store away for the winter. People were afraid their families would go hungry, so they hid the small amounts of food they did have. They even hid their food from their friends and neighbors.

One day a wandering soldier came into the village. He asked different people he met about finding a place to eat and sleep for the night.

"There's not a bit to eat in the whole county," they told him. "You better keep moving on."

"Oh, I have everything I need," he said. "In fact, I would like to make some *stone soup* to share with all of you." He pulled a big black cooking pot from his wagon. He filled it with water and built a fire under it. Then, he reached slowly into his knapsack and, while several villagers watched, he pulled a plain gray stone from a cloth bag and dropped it into the water.

By now, hearing about the magic stone, most of the villagers were surrounding the soldier and his cooking pot. As the soldier sniffed the stone soup and licked his lips, the villagers began to overcome their lack of trust.

"Ahh," the soldier said aloud to himself, "I do like a tasty stone soup. Of course, stone soup with cabbage is even better."

Soon a villager ran from his house into the village square, holding a cabbage. "I have this cabbage from my garden," he said as he held it out for the soldier.

"Fantastic!" cried the soldier. The soldier cut up the cabbage and added it to the pot. "You know, I once had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of beef, and it was delicious."

The butcher said he thought he could find some beef scraps. As he ran back to his shop, other villagers offered bits of vegetables from their own

gardens – potatoes, onions, carrots, and celery. Soon the big black pot was bubbling and steaming. When the soup was ready, everyone in the village ate a bowl of soup, and it was delicious.

The villagers offered the soldier money and other treasures for the magic stone, but he refused to sell it. He had many offers for a cot to sleep on that night. The next day he traveled on his way. ***(Adapted from the classic folktale from the Aarne-Thompson folktale system)***

This story demonstrates to us the important message of working together and sharing what we have. Instead of being afraid of giving, it challenges us to give what we have, so that together we can see the miracles of God happen. Out of nothing comes abundance and gratitude for what we have.

What are you thankful for this thanksgiving? What are you thankful for each day? We are called to be a thankful people, a people living in gratitude to God for the many blessings we have. We are not to hide what we have with clutched hands but to give what we have with open hands.

God calls us to be thankful in all things even in the midst of painful and difficult situations, even in the midst of a pandemic, even in the midst of the storms of our life.

Our Bible has many stories of people who were grateful in the midst of difficult times.

Daniel gave thanks despite the risk. When the Persian King wanted to promote Daniel to second highest in the Kingdom, the other officials conspired to take Daniel down. They convinced King Darius to issue an edict that read: Pray to the king or suffer the lion's den. With his life at risk, Daniel could have given in to the pressure to do as all were doing, worshiping the King instead of the Creator, but Daniel stayed steadfast and faithful. Daniel bent to pray and give thanks to God three times a day. Daniel chose gratitude to God, giving what he could give, despite the risk to his life.

I'm sure Daniel, daily, thanked God for his constant provision and his faithfulness at every turn. He thanked God for his goodness no matter what. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den for an entire night and God shut the lion's mouths and Daniel emerged not only alive, but without so much as a scratch. I'm sure Daniel was eternally thankful to God.

Then there is the story of Hannah. Hannah wanted a child and couldn't have children. In deep pain, she went to the tabernacle and cried out to God, promising if He gave her a son, she would give him back for life-long service.

God did give Hannah a son, Samuel. Hannah did keep her vow and took Samuel to live with the priest. Hannah loved Samuel and was deeply grateful for her gift God blessed her with. Though she loved her Samuel, Hannah chose to worship the Giver of the gift and not the gift.

In 1 Samuel 2:1-2 Hannah has a prayer of thanks and gratitude to God. Hannah prayed:

“My heart rejoices in the Lord! The Lord has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies; I rejoice because you rescued me. No one is holy like the Lord! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.”

The Apostle Paul gave thanks in the middle of a storm. In Acts 27 we read that Paul had been imprisoned and put on a ship for Rome under Roman guard. The ship was soon caught in a violent hurricane. The crew tried to hold the ship together. By the 14th day, they gave up hope of being saved. But that night, an angel appeared to Paul in a dream, assuring him no one would die. The storm raged on, and the ship looked like it would be dashed against the rocks. They dropped four anchors and prayed for daylight. No one had eaten for 14 days, and just before sunrise, Paul urged everyone to eat to regain strength. In the midst of the storm, Paul took bread, gave thanks to God before the entire ship, broke the bread and distributed it. The next day, all 276 aboard made it safely to shore. Paul gave thanks in the midst of the storm.

Jesus gave thanks before there was enough food. Jesus fed 5000 people plus because he saw the people were hungry and tired and all ate until they were satisfied and they gathered 12 baskets of leftovers.

Remember the times that God has provided for you and met your needs and be grateful. When we ask God to meet our needs we can thank him in advance for his provision.

Jesus gave thanks before going to the cross. On the evening of the Last Supper, knowing he was about to be betrayed, arrested, mocked, beaten and crucified, Jesus gave thanks. Jesus was grateful for the privilege of obeying his Father and of fulfilling the mission He had been sent to earth to complete.

Thankfulness and gratitude helps us realize that all we have comes from God and we are called to daily give thanks no matter what we are in the midst of. Just as the people in the Bible had a new awareness of God working in their lives, it teaches us the same thing. Gratitude opens our spiritual eyes. There's a beautiful cycle in giving God thanks. The more we thank God, the more we see God working in us and around us. Gratitude helps us sense God's presence, His personal care and his perfect timing.

Part of his will for us is to be thankful, all the time and everyday, not just on the sunny days, but on the hard ones, the stormy days.

James 1:16-17 says, "Do not be deceived, my beloved ones. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights."

1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you."

Gratitude helps us see God at work in our lives.

As Philippians 4:6-7 reminds us: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

When Jesus healed the ten Lepers all were happy, but only one was thankful and returned telling Jesus of his gratitude.

What do you need to express your thanks for? What fills your heart with gratitude?

If we aren't grateful for what God has given us, getting more won't satisfy us either. Being thankful is the key to contentment.

Keeping a record of God's past faithfulness is a faith boost when we face new difficulty. Try to start a Gratitude Journal and write down the ways you see God working in your life and what you are thankful and grateful for. When you write them down, it will bring to memory all the storms and trials that God brought you through, and it will remind you of the faithfulness of God, and you will give thanks.

Psalms 136:1 tells us, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever."

What an eternal promise of God and a call for us to be thankful.

The world doesn't tell us to be thankful in all circumstances, but God does.

The overflow of gratitude is joy. Psalm 138 says "I will give You thanks with all my heart."

Gratitude makes us realize God has given us far more than we deserve. Like Stone Soup, we have something to be thankful for because there's enough for everyone when we work together. We can work together to make a difference and a grateful heart can see the needs of others around them.

Gratitude opens our eyes to the simple beauty of ordinary days and that God has gifts for us along life's journey.

Psalm 105:1 says, "Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness Let the whole world know what he has done."

When we thank God openly and acknowledge what God has done for us, we are proclaiming a personal, caring God to the world around us. We show that contentment and peace come not from what we have but whose we are.

When we develop a grateful heart it brings incredible blessings.

Frances Schaeffer once said, "The beginning of man's rebellion against God was, and is, the lack of a thankful heart."

W.E. Henley's famous poem entitled "Invictus" which in Latin means, "Unconquered" says, "It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." Its imagery is that of a person standing at the gates of hell, unafraid because he is sufficient unto himself. This summarizes the sentiments of our day. It is an attitude that sees oneself as the source of strength, happiness and prosperity. We live with the ever-present danger of thinking that we are what we are, or have what we have, solely because of what we have done. It is an attitude that runs against scriptural teaching and is inconsistent with the Spirit-filled life.

In April 30, 1863 President Abraham Lincoln read his Proclamation for a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer. This is part of what he said: "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved, the many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power, as no other nation has ever grown.

But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own." Abraham Lincoln's words are for today as well.

We have so much to be grateful for. Psalm 100 tells us that God is worthy of praise and we can make a joyful noise with thankful hearts. "Serve the Lord with gladness, come before Him with joyful songs." "Acknowledge that Yahweh is God." He alone is God.

No one else deserves our service like He does. He must be first in our lives. We need to live and serve with an attitude of gratitude. When we bless the Lord, we have no choice but to give thanks.

"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise His name."

"For the Lord is good, and his love is eternal. His faithfulness endures through all generations." He is a good God, and he has mercy on us.

Open your eyes to the world around you and it will cause you to be grateful for what we have in our county. Turn your attitude of gratitude into an action of appreciation for all the blessings around us.

We are grateful for this beautiful church as we celebrate 142 years of service to God and to this community of Elmer, NJ. Many people's lives have been changed in this building as they come to know the Lord and grow in their faith. We pray for the future of this church as we move forward with thankful hearts and service to God as we work together.

What are you thankful for? Does your life demonstrate a sense of gratitude to God? Is there joy in your life? How have you demonstrated your gratitude to Christ lately?

God doesn't like it when we grumble, but He loves it when we praise and give thanks. As we begin to live a life of thankfulness to God, He begins to work, even through the toughest trials, tests of faith and the storms of life.

Watch: God does miracles on our behalf when we choose to thank him and praise Him and live with an attitude of gratitude.