GROWING GENEROSITY: THANKSGIVING THROUGH THANKS LIVING

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Psalm 100 Colossians 1:9-14, NRSV

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# SETTING THE CONTEXT

My NRSV Bible titles the psalm we’re about to read as “All Lands Summoned to Praise God: A Psalm of Thanksgiving.” The vision that Psalm 100 paints is a glorious one. We see people from all lands coming together to worship God. Eugene Peterson paraphrases it, “Bring a gift of laughter, sing yourselves into God’s presence.” The “sheep of God’s pasture,” God’s people, assemble from throughout the countryside forming a great procession that moves to the city gates entering the city streets winding their way through the shops and homes into the central part of the city. The multitude walks through the temple gates and into the temple courts where God is present and worshipped. The crowd sings their thanksgiving to God for the incredible gift of steadfast love and grace. Let us join this procession.

Read Psalm 100 UM Hymnal #821 using Response 1

This letter is written to the church community in Colossae. In that day, it was a cosmopolitan city where people of diverse cultures and religions met and mingled.[[1]](#endnote-1) The writer begins his letter with affirmations of his love and gratitude, complementing the community on their faith and love for each other. He mentions their minister, Epaphras, and how he reported to them about the Colossians love in the Spirit. Then Paul shares his prayer and his hope for these people. This is where our reading picks up.

Read Colossians 1:9-14, NRSV

# THE SERMON

We have a lot of choices about how we will live. Oh, I admit that there are some things we don’t have control over, in fact quite a few things, but we can choose how we will respond. This poem the Sculptor’s Attitude illustrates this well.

I woke up today, excited over all I get to do before the clock strikes midnight. I have responsibilities to fulfil today. I get to choose what kind of day I am going to have.

Today I can complain because the weather is rainy or...I can be thankful that the grass and shrubs are getting watered for free.

Today I can feel sad that I don't have more money or...I can be glad that my finances encourage me to plan my purchases wisely and guide me away from waste.

Today I can grumble about my health or...I can rejoice that I am alive.

Today I can lament over all that my parents didn't give me when I was growing up or...I can feel grateful that they allowed me to be born.

Today I can cry because roses have thorns or...I can celebrate that thorns have roses.

Today I can mourn my lack of friends or...I can excitedly embark upon a quest to discover new relationships.

Today I can whine because I have to go to work or...I can shout for joy because I have a job to do.

Today I can complain because I have to go to school or...I can eagerly open my mind and fill it with rich new tidbits of knowledge.

Today I can murmur dejectedly because I have to do housework or...I can feel honored because the Lord has provided shelter for my mind, body, and soul.

Today stretches ahead of me, waiting to be shaped. And here I am, the sculptor who gets to do the shaping.” The attitude I bring to today is up to me.[[2]](#endnote-2)

**The poem points to an attitude of gratitude**. It encourages us to approach life not taking things for granted even the most basic things, but seeking to be thankful for them. **I’m not saying we can never be sad or angry because sometimes sad things happen, bad things happen and we need to grieve them or get angry about them, but I think the challenge to refocus from an outlook of dissatisfaction to one of thanks-giving is valid.**

It’s wonderful to have a holiday specifically focused on Thanksgiving; yearly it realigns our attention and encourages us to be grateful. For us as people of faith, it is timed beautifully. **Thanksgiving always comes at the very end of the liturgical year. In the yearly story of faith told by our Sunday celebrations and readings, we end the church year this week with Christ the King Sunday and Thanksgiving**. Next Sunday, we begin the great circle of the church year all over again with the season of Advent. While living under a king is foreign to us as Americans, we know all about loyalty and authority. **Christ the King Sunday reminds us that as Christians our ultimate loyalty belongs to Christ; he is the final authority in our lives**. And we learn from his story that he is not like other kings. He was born not in power, but in vulnerability. He did not win victory through might, but through God’s great power to overcome suffering, even cruel suffering at the hands of a powerful state. This is the king we thank God for giving us. This is the king we are called to follow. In this Thanksgiving week, we are reminded to reflect on the many gifts of our lives including the gift of Jesus and to be grateful. **In gratitude for his life, death and resurrection, in gratitude for his love that rescues us from all that separates us from God, we are invited to offer our thanksgiving through thanks living.**

**In the passage we read Paul described thanks living this way, “***May you be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God***.”** Do you see the action words in his prayer? “***Lead lives*** worthy of the Lord, ***Bear fruit*** in every good work. ***Grow*** in the knowledge of God.” Thanksgiving by thanks living.

We spend the entire year, year after year learning and practicing thanks living. **Every aspect of our church is geared to help us draw close to God through Christ, to help us capture a vision of the life he wants us to live and to apply that vision to our own lives**. It is geared to help us as a community embody Christ through our ministries and outreach. With your growing generosity, we have been able to do that in more ways this year. In a few moments, we will dedicate to God our estimate of giving commitments for 2017. We will also be dedicating the newly remodeled kitchen and fellowship hall, which has made our church more family-friendly and will help us do events that will draw us closer to each other. That remodeling work was made possible by generous giving over and above our capital campaign. We have much to be grateful for, many reasons to “bring a gift of laughter, sing ourselves into God’s presence.” I hope that you will support the work of the church financially and that your commitment is included in today’s offering. If not, please consider going online or completing a card and adding it to our offering. Growing generosity is a characteristic of a growing Christian. Thanks giving through thanks living.

When I was a little girl growing up in the Episcopal church in the Morning Prayer service we chanted Psalm 100 known as the *Jubilate*. **Think about that over years of singing and worship, I have buried deep within me this song of thanksgiving**. Occasionally like this week something causes it to bubble up, “Be joyful in the Lord all ye lands; serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song. … We are his people and the sheep of his pasture…For the Lord is gracious his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth from generation to generation.”[[3]](#endnote-3) We have so much to be thankful for.

**May our thanksgiving this week translate into thanks living over the next year.** As we sculpt our days, weeks and years may the Divine King’s hands guide our hands and attitudes. May our thanksgiving translate into “lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as we bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:10) May our thanksgiving translate into embodying Christ by loving God and loving our neighbor, by loving as *he* loved us. Thanksgiving through thanks living. Amen.

1. Ralph P. Martin, Interpretation: *A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1991), p. 81-82. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from The Sculptor's Attitude, <http://achievebalance.com/think/sculptor.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *The Book of Common Prayer*. The Episcopal Church. (New York, Church Publishing Inc., 1979) p. 82. The online version is at <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/book_of_common_prayer.pdf> . [↑](#endnote-ref-3)