

“THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE”

“THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE.”

THE THOUGHT OF THAT MAY MAKE YOU A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE – WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING WHAT I MEAN BY IT.

I THINK IT’S ALWAYS A BIT UNSETTLING WHEN WE TRY TO THINK OF SOMETHING FROM ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW.

COUNTLESS TIMES A DAY WE SEE THINGS FROM A PARTICULAR PERSPECTIVE.

WE BRING TO EVERY SITUATION & EVERY CONVERSATION OUR OWN BACKLOG OF EXPERIENCES & IDEAS & OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS.

IT’S A GOOD IDEA, AT LEAST ON OCCASION, TO GIVE THOUGHT TO WHY SOMEONE HAS A DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING OF SOMETHING THAN WHAT YOUR UNDERSTANDING IS.

WHAT – IN THEIR LIFE & EXPERIENCE – HAS BROUGHT THEM TO A DIFFERENT CONCLUSION THAN YOU’VE REACHED.

HOW MIGHT YOUR VIEW BE CHANGED IF YOUR LIFE WAS MORE LIKE THEIRS.

I DON’T NEED TO GIVE YOU EXAMPLES BECAUSE I’M SURE YOU CAN COME UP WITH A HUNDRED POSSIBILITIES.

AS YOU LOOK AT THAT TITLE – “THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE,” I IMAGINE YOU HAVE A VARIETY OF THOUGHTS ABOUT THE DIRECTION THIS SERMON MIGHT TAKE.

SINCE I’M THE ONE WHO CAME UP WITH IT – AFTER I ALREADY KNEW ITS FOCUS – IT MADE PERFECT SENSE TO ME.

I DIDN’T GIVE THOUGHT TO ANOTHER POSSIBLE DIRECTION THAT TITLE MIGHT TAKE US.

BUT THEN, THIS WEEK, AS I READ THE TITLE ON THE SIGN OUTSIDE, I HAD A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT THOUGHT AS TO WHAT “*THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE*” MIGHT MEAN.

AND THEN I THOUGHT OF OTHERS.

THE FIRST THING THAT CAME TO MY MIND AS I READ THAT TITLE WITHOUT THINKING OF WHERE I WAS GOING WITH IT WAS “*THANKSGIVING FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE NATIVE AMERICANS.*”

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLIDAY THAT WE’LL CELEBRATE THIS WEEK IS FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE PILGRIMS.

AS WITH OTHER HOLIDAYS, THE STORY OF THE FIRST THANKSGIVING HAS A LEGENDARY QUALITY ABOUT IT.

46 OF THE 102 SETTLERS DIED IN THEIR FIRST WINTER HERE & WITHOUT THE HELP OF SQUANTO & THE OTHER WAMPANOAG INDIANS, SURELY ALL OF THEM WOULD HAVE PERISHED.

BUT THEY LEARNED HOW & WHERE TO HUNT & FISH AND WHAT KIND OF CROPS TO PLANT & THE FOLLOWING FALL BROUGHT A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST & A CHANCE AT SURVIVAL.

PILGRIMS & NATIVE AMERICANS GATHERED TOGETHER TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR THE BLESSINGS BESTOWED UPON THEM.

THAT'S THE STORY WE'VE LEARNED FROM EARLIEST CHILDHOOD.

AND THE AMAZING THING IS – IT'S PROBABLY ALL TRUE.

BUT ALL THAT HAS FOLLOWED IN THE HISTORY OF OUR NATION WOULD SURELY GIVE NATIVE AMERICANS A RATHER DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON THE HOLIDAY WE CALL THANKSGIVING.

SO *“THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE”* COULD LOGICALLY TAKE THAT DIRECTION.

THAT ISN'T WHAT I MEAN BY THAT TITLE, THOUGH.

I SUPPOSE ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING AT *“THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE”* MIGHT BE TO CONSIDER THOSE WHOSE CIRCUMSTANCES PROVIDE NO REASON TO GIVE THANKS.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO ENDURE PAIN & HEARTACHE THAT LIE BEYOND OUR COMPREHENSION – THOSE WHOSE TROUBLES SEEM UNENDING & INSURMOUNTABLE.

YES, THAT MIGHT BE THE DIRECTION A TITLE LIKE *“THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE”* WOULD TAKE.

BUT I THINK WE ALL KNOW THOSE WHO, DESPITE LIVING WITH ADVERSITY BEYOND OUR MOST FRIGHTFUL FEARS, MANAGE TO POSSESS A DEEP & ABIDING SPIRIT OF GENUINE GRATITUDE WITHIN THEM.

SO THAT'S NOT I MEAN BY *“THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE.”*

I ALSO DON'T WANT TO, IN ANY WAY, DIMINISH THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BASIC MEANING OF THE HOLIDAY – CERTAINLY NOT WHEN IT'S THE ONE DAY IN THE YEAR THAT WE HAVE SET ASIDE TO DO SOMETHING WE KNOW WE SHOULD BE DOING EVERY HOUR OR EVERY DAY OF EVERY YEAR.

IN THIS PASSAGE WE'VE READ THIS MORNING, WE FIND PAUL – AS WE SO OFTEN DO – EXPRESSING HIS DEEP THANKS TO GOD – *“I REJOICE IN THE LORD GREATLY....I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH HIM WHO STRENGTHENS ME.”*

SO, NO, I DON'T WANT TO IN ANY WAY DIMINISH THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS HOLIDAY & ITS PRIMARY MEANING FOR OUR LIVES – A REMINDER TO GIVE THANKS – AGAIN, AS PAUL SAYS HERE – *“IN ANY AND ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.”*

BUT IT IS PRECISELY THESE WORDS OF PAUL THAT WE'VE READ THAT LEAD US TO WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO SUGGEST AS *“THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE.”*

THE GERMAN MYSTIC MEISTER ECKHART SAID *“IF THE ONLY PRAYER YOU MAKE IS ‘THANK YOU,’ THAT WILL SUFFICE.”*

ONE OF MY FAVORITE SAYINGS OF DAG HAMMARSKJOLD IS:

“FOR ALL THAT HAS BEEN – THANKS!

FOR ALL THAT WILL BE – YES!”

GIVING THANKS FOR EVERYTHING SHOULD BE A WAY OF LIFE FOR EVERY ONE OF US.

SO, AGAIN, I DON'T WANT TO DIMINISH THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF OUR OWN *“THANKS-GIVING.”*

BUT AS WE LOOK AT THESE WORDS OF PAUL, THEY GIVE US ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE.
HE'S ENCOURAGING US HERE TO BE THANKFUL IN EVERY SITUATION.
HE'S CHALLENGING US TO AWAKEN EACH DAY SAYING, "I'M THANKFUL THAT I HAVE BEEN SO BLESSED."
FOR MANY, THAT STATEMENT IS A PRAYER & IT'S A PRAYER THAT CONTINUES WITH "I'M THANKFUL
FOR..." AND THEN YOU LIST THE PEOPLE & THE THINGS FOR WHICH YOU ARE GRATEFUL.
ISN'T THAT WHAT PAUL DOES HERE?
HE'S THANKFUL TO GOD & HE'S SPECIFICALLY THANKFUL FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE CHURCH IN PHILLIPI.
HE'S THANKFUL FOR THEIR LOVE, THEIR CONCERN, THEIR HELPFULNESS, THEIR GENEROSITY.
WHAT I MEAN WHEN I SAY "THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE" IS – WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO BE
INCLUDED IN SOMEONE ELSE'S LIST OF PEOPLE & THINGS FOR WHICH THEY ARE THANKFUL?
THAT'S THE CHALLENGE I'D LIKE TO PUT BEFORE US THIS MORNING.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO MAKE SOMEONE ELSE THANKFUL?
IN ADDITION TO BEING A PERSON WHO *EXPRESSES* THANKS, WHY NOT MAKE IT A GOAL OF YOURS TO BE A
PERSON WHO *ELICITS* THANKS IN OTHERS?
THAT'S WHAT I MEAN BY "THANKSGIVING FROM THE OTHER SIDE."
WHEN PAUL WRITES TO THE CORINTHIANS, HE TELLS THEM THEY HAVE BEEN "ENRICHED IN EVERY WAY
TO BE GENEROUS IN EVERY WAY."
DON'T JUST "GIVE THANKS" – CREATE THANKS WITHIN OTHERS.
IN ADDITION TO WAKING UP EACH MORNING THINKING "I'M THANKFUL THAT I HAVE BEEN SO BLESSED,"
WHY NOT WAKE UP WONDERING "HOW CAN I MAKE SOMEONE ELSE THANKFUL? WHAT CAN I DO TODAY THAT WILL
FILL ANOTHER PERSON'S LIFE WITH THANKSGIVING?"
THAT'S THE CHALLENGE I'D LIKE TO OFFER YOU FOR THE FOURTH THURSDAY IN NOVEMBER THIS YEAR
AND, LIKE THANKSGIVING ITSELF, I'D LIKE TO CHALLENGE YOU TO TURN IT INTO A LIFESTYLE.
MAY THAT THOUGHT BE AS FIRMLY IN YOUR MIND AS THE THOUGHT OF THANKSGIVING ITSELF.
BUT HOW DO WE DO IT?
HOW DO YOU BECOME THAT FOR WHICH SOMEONE ELSE IS THANKFUL?
I CAN THINK OF THREE SIMPLE WAYS – WORDS, ACTIONS, RESOURCES.
FIRST OF ALL, WORDS.
THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR WORDS CAN'T BE OVERSTATED.
IN MANY WAYS, THEY'RE THE STUFF OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS.
IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, OFFER WORDS OF APPRECIATION, WORDS OF KINDNESS, WORDS
OF HOPE, WORDS THAT WILL BUILD UP & NEVER TEAR DOWN.
IN MANY WAYS I'M PREACHING TO THE CHOIR HERE, BECAUSE, THROUGH THE YEARS & ESPECIALLY IN
RECENT WEEKS, I HAVE PERSONALLY BEEN THE RECIPIENT OF YOUR WORDS OF APPRECIATION, HOPE &
KINDNESS – WORDS INTENDED TO BUILD UP & NOT TEAR DOWN.

SO I SPEAK AS SOMEONE WHO KNOWS HOW MUCH WORDS CAN ELICIT THANKS IN OTHERS BECAUSE YOUR WORDS HAVE ELICITED THANKS IN ME.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF YOUR WORDS.

WHETHER IT BE WITH A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND, A CO-WORKER OR NEIGHBOR, A SALES CLERK OR A CASUAL, HAPPENSTANCE ENCOUNTER – MAY YOUR WORDS ALWAYS BE OFFERED IN A MANNER THAT WILL CREATE A SPIRIT OF THANKFULNESS IN THE HEART OF THE RECIPIENT OF THOSE WORDS.

THE SECOND THING THAT WILL ENABLE YOU TO BECOME THAT FOR WHICH SOMEONE ELSE IS THANKFUL IS ACTIONS.

ALWAYS BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THINGS THAT YOU CAN DO THAT WILL MAKE SOMEONE ELSE THANKFUL.

SOMETIMES – ESPECIALLY FOR MEN - IT CAN BE SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS OPENING A DOOR AT A STORE FOR SOMEONE TO ENTER BEFORE YOU, THOUGH AUTOMATIC DOORS HAVE MADE IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO BE POLITE ANYMORE.

OR HOW ABOUT SOMETHING MORE SUBSTANTIVE.

IN A DIFFICULT TIME FOR SOMEONE, WE OFTEN ASK, “*IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO?*”

IT’S OFTEN ASKED SIMPLY BECAUSE IT SEEMS LIKE THE POLITE THING TO DO.

BUT SOMETIMES YOU REALLY MEAN IT & ARE WILLING TO DO WHATEVER THE PERSON ASKS, BUT YOU JUST DON’T KNOW WHAT IT IS.

THE PROBLEM IS, THE OTHER PERSON MAY BE IN SUCH A STATE THAT THEY REALLY DON’T KNOW *WHAT* THEY NEED.

SOMETIMES IT MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA TO PROJECT YOURSELF INTO THEIR SITUATION – CONSIDER WHAT *YOU’D* NEED IF YOU WERE THERE & JUST GO AHEAD & DO IT.

YOUR ACTIONS CAN SO OFTEN ELICIT THANKSGIVING IN OTHERS.

THE THIRD CATEGORY THAT WILL ENABLE YOU TO BECOME THAT FOR WHICH SOMEONE ELSE IS THANKFUL IS RESOURCES.

GIVING TANGIBLE ASSISTANCE TO SOMEONE WILL ELICIT THANKSGIVING IN THEM.

SOME OF YOU HAVE THE MISTAKEN IDEA THAT YOU CAN’T AFFORD TO DO THIS.

ALSO, FOR SOME OF YOU, THAT ATTITUDE IS PERHAPS A CARRY-OVER FROM TIMES WHEN YOU REALLY *COULDN’T* HELP SOMEONE ELSE BECAUSE YOU WERE THE ONE IN NEED YOURSELF.

THINK BACK TO THOSE TIMES WHEN YOU WERE THE RECIPIENT OF SOMEONE ELSE’S GENEROSITY & LONGED FOR THE DAY WHEN YOU COULD BE GENEROUS YOURSELF.

IN THIS PASSAGE FROM PHILIPPIANS, PAUL SAYS, “...*INDEED, YOU WERE CONCERNED FOR ME, BUT HAD NO OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW IT.*”

THE PHILIPPIANS SIMPLY WEREN’T IN A POSITION TO ASSIST PAUL, BUT NOW THEY ARE & THEIR GENEROSITY HAS ELICITED FROM HIM A DEEP & PROFOUND SPIRIT OF THANKSGIVING.

WHEN I WAS IN SEMINARY, SOME STUDENTS IN THE DORM WERE TRYING TO GET DONATIONS TO BUY ANOTHER STUDENT A TYPEWRITER.

HE WAS FROM JAPAN & HE HAD VIRTUALLY NOTHING TO HELP HIM IN HIS STUDIES.

WHEN I WAS ASKED TO DONATE SOMETHING, I SAID I REALLY WISHED I COULD BUT DIDN'T HAVE ANY MONEY MYSELF.

IN FACT, I TOLD THE PERSON MAKING THE REQUEST, I DIDN'T HAVE A TYPEWRITER MYSELF & HAD TO GO TO THE LIBRARY OR BORROW ONE FROM ANOTHER STUDENT FOR PAPERS.

THE NEXT DAY, I WALKED INTO MY ROOM, AND THERE, SITTING ON MY BED, WAS TYPEWRITER.

IT WAS A USED, MANUAL TYPEWRITER – BUT IT WAS A TYPEWRITER.

NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRIED, I NEVER DID FIND OUT – OR EVEN HAVE A CLUE – AS TO WHERE OR WHO THAT TYPEWRITER CAME FROM.

BUT I USED IT ALL THROUGH SEMINARY & FOR SEVERAL YEARS AFTERWARDS & EVERY TIME I DID, I WAS FILLED WITH GREAT THANKSGIVING FOR THE ONE WHO HAD SEEN MY NEED & RESPONDED TO IT.

I'M NO LONGER THE ONE IN NEED & I HAVE TO BE CAREFUL THAT I DON'T LIVE AS IF I AM AND, THEREFORE MISS OUT ON OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE TO THOSE WHO ARE.

WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED ITSELF TO THE PHILIPPIANS, THEY GENEROUSLY GAVE FROM THEIR ABUNDANCE.

THREE WAYS THAT WILL ENABLE YOU TO BECOME THAT FOR WHICH SOMEONE ELSE IS THANKFUL ARE WORDS, ACTIONS & RESOURCES.

YOU COULD MAKE AN ACRONYM OUT OF IT – WORDS, ACTIONS, RESOURCES – W-A-R = WAR.

BUT MAYBE THAT'S NOT THE BEST ACRONYM FOR A THANKSGIVING SERMON!

BUT, ON THE OTHER HAND, MAYBE IT'S NOT SO BAD AFTER ALL.

MAYBE IT SUGGESTS TO US THAT THESE THREE THINGS WOULD ENABLE US TO INITIATE A WAR ON APATHY, A WAR ON INACTION, A WAR ON NEGATIVITY & A WAR ON SELFISHNESS.

THIS YEAR, DON'T IN ANY WAY MINIMIZE YOUR EXPRESSIONS OF THANKS.

BUT, IN ADDITION TO THOSE EXPRESSIONS OF THANKS, WHY NOT USE YOUR WORDS, YOUR ACTIONS & YOUR RESOURCES TO ELICIT THANKS IN OTHERS. AMEN.

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