

November 22, 2009, Thanksgiving Sunday
“Don’t Forget to Say ‘Thank You!’”

Psalm 65
Matthew 6 : 25 - 34

All the parents I know or ever have known have taught their kids to say “thank you!” From the time most kids can talk, their parents coach them, saying, “Say Thank you!” and later on saying, “What do you say?”

Our society seems to be getting less civil, more impolite every day, and yet I still hear this kind of training going on. It seems to be one bit of politeness that we still value, at least in our children. I am not sure that adults, even the parents who are teaching their children so well, always remember to say thank you.

So much of the time that courtesy, that appreciation, is forgotten in the pressures of daily living. We just don't stop often enough to say thank you.

We take a lot for granted, or we feel we're entitled, or we are just too distracted by the number of things on our to-do list, or we are just in too much of a rush to take time to say thanks!

We not only forget to say it to each other, we forget to say it to God! As though we were self-sufficient. As though God does not do anything for us.

And those of us who do forget need to start saying thank you more often to God for the many blessings that he has given us!

A couple of weeks ago, one of my Facebook friends put out a challenge. She asked us to post as our status every day until Thanksgiving something we are grateful for. For those of you who don't know about Facebook, your status tells your friends what's going on with you at the moment.

Most of the time it's trivia, like "I just got back from walking the dog" or "I'm going to Disneyland!" Other times it's how you find out that someone's mother is dying, or that someone is moving or just got a new job.

I accepted the challenge and I am finding that naming something I am grateful for every day is a little difficult. Some days my cup overflows with gratitude and it's easy, but other days I have to stop and search my heart to find something.

Every day! What am I grateful for? Sometimes little things, like having ice cream for dessert. Sometimes big things, like finding out that a friend who has been struggling with serious health issues for a year is finally getting better!

Every time I have had a hard time coming up with something to be grateful for, I look at Marcia's status.

Pastor Marcia Hartsock is the one who put out the initial Facebook challenge. I put her on our prayer chain in October. Marcia and I went through seminary together. While we were in seminary, she battled breast cancer. I don't know how she made it, except to say by the grace of God.

Last month she was diagnosed with lung cancer. It came from some missed cancer cells from her first battle with cancer.

She is in chemo. She lives in a small town on the Big Island of Hawaii and has to travel to the next city for treatment.

Sometimes she has to fly to Honolulu for tests. She has lost her hair. She sometimes feels very sick.

Reading the reasons she is grateful every day just astounds me. I don't think I would be feeling so grateful if I had just had chemotherapy or found my hair lying on my pillow. But she does.

She is grateful for the bird singing outside her window who wakes her up at 6:30 in the morning. She is grateful for the rain. She is grateful for the sun. She is grateful for a supportive congregation who sign up to take her to treatment, wait for hours with her, and then bring her home. She is grateful for laughter and flowers and every day that she can go to work.

Her attitude inspires me. I am more than grateful to have her for a friend. Because of her I find myself being more grateful every day.

In our reading from the gospel according to Matthew this morning, we hear Jesus saying “don’t worry, God takes care of you.” He gets after us a little bit, saying, “Do you think you will live any longer because you worry??”

Of course we won’t. In fact, we just might shorten our lives because worrying raises blood pressure! Besides, most of what we worry about never happens.

Worrying does worse than that, though. Worry can make it even harder for us to be grateful. If we are worried about what might happen tomorrow, we are not paying attention to all the things we have to be grateful for today! We don't have room in our lives for both worry and gratitude!

This is one more benefit of taking time to think about what I'm grateful for. I am not half as worried. My focus is on the good things that have happened and are happening, not on the bad things that might or might not happen.

If I am worried about what might fall on my head, I don't notice the beautiful flowers growing at my feet! But if I am enjoying the flowers, I stop thinking about the sky falling!

I am grateful for so many things, because God has blessed me in so many ways!

And you? What are you grateful for? God has heaped blessings on all of us, all around all of us! Have you said thank you lately?

For me, making a somewhat public statement on Facebook every day has become a spiritual discipline, something that has helped me to feel closer to God. But it's not really the public nature of that act that is important. It's the daily nature of it. Some days I have written several things I am grateful for. Other days I have had a hard time to write even one thing.

I can look back over what I have written on Facebook and have some beginning of an understanding of what God has done for me lately. It's humbling, and it makes me feel very loved.

I am grateful for beautiful sunsets, for being in San Diego, for being married to Dale, for being a pastor. For so many people coming to work so hard around here yesterday! For charge conference being over with! For wonderful Sundays. For all of you! Every day, there are many amazing gifts from God!

Thinking about all that God has done for me, I am, once again, amazed by grace.

So I would suggest to you to start keeping a gratitude journal. If you already keep a journal, add this to your writings. Or just get a small notepad and write every evening what God has done for you that day. Or maybe you can Facebook it, or keep a Word file on your computer. Whatever works for you.

Give it a try, this regular expression of gratitude. I think you will find that you worry less and become more aware of everything that God is doing in your life! You will live more positively in the present. Your life will become less stressful and more abundant if you just take a minute to say thank you!

What are you grateful for this morning?