

**Colossians 3:12-17**  
**(Psalm 107; Matthew 11:25-30)**  
**“And Give Thanks”**

**Introduction**

Once again our nation prepares to celebrate Thanksgiving as we have throughout our history, in times of peace and times of war, in times of prosperity and times of hardship, we have realized as a people that God has blessed us throughout our history, beginning with the Pilgrims of Plymouth Plantation, and that we should always in all circumstances give him thanks and praise.

Thus it has been throughout human history for all those who recognize the hand of God at work in their lives. In this morning’s Psalm, we are called to “give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever” (Psalm 107:1), and are particularly encouraged to remember the times and ways that the Lord has rescued us from trouble. Four illustrations are given: refugees wandering from place to place but finding no home, prisoners suffering justly for crimes they have committed, sick people suffering illnesses caused by their own folly, and travelers whose business takes them down to the sea in ships now caught in violent storms that threaten to overwhelm them. In each case, they cry to the Lord in their distress and he delivers them and brings them to safety. In no case are they delivered because of their own righteousness or because they deserve to be delivered from trouble, but rather because of God’s “steadfast love” that “endures forever.”

You and I, as we enter another thanksgiving season, should also step back and reflect on the Lord’s steadfast love toward us, giving him thanks for delivering us, sometimes from the consequences of our own folly, and sometimes from the antagonism of others. Do we realize, even at times when our national sense of well-being is at a low ebb, our economy struggling and our government gridlocked, how uniquely blessed we are to be citizens of this land? [Relate recent China travels.]

Of course, we have no assurance that we will always enjoy the freedoms that we enjoy today, that we will always be able to worship, travel and speak freely. And yet – whatever our circumstances – we are called as God’s people to give thanks to the Lord, whether we are prospering or struggling, whether we are healthy or sick, free or enslaved, because ultimately God has set us free from sin and death and given us the prospect of a redeemed life of intimate friendship with him, now and for eternity.

In his Colossian letter, the apostle Paul calls us to put to death our old ways of living, to cast off our old life as we would soiled clothing, and to put on the new life given us in Christ Jesus. In our text, he reminds us of three crucial ways that we are to experience this new life, each one leading us to give thanks to the Lord whose steadfast love endures forever.

## Body

### **1. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart, and give thanks (3:15).**

The peace that Jesus promised to his disciples (“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” John 14:27) should rule all of our relationships. For Christians to be separated from one another – embittered and at war with each other – is a defeat of the gospel. For families to be torn apart, husbands and wives who once vowed to love one another for life now being at enmity with one another is a tragic denial of the gospel. For parents and children to be at war with one another is a denial of the gospel of peace. For former friends and neighbors to be alienated from one another is a denial of the gospel of Christ.

Paul says, “Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts.” The word translated “rule” is taken from sports: it was used in the ancient world to describe an umpire who settled disagreements between opponents. Paul is saying that, in every potential disagreement, the umpire is to be peace. The rule to which we appeal is the same peace that Christ has made with us, who have sinned against him, offended him, and even crucified him. This is the foundation of our thanksgiving, the shalom – that is, the peace, wholeness, health and reconciliation – that we have in Christ alone.

### **2. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, and give thanks (3:16).**

We cannot know the peace of Christ, the love of Christ, or the power of the Holy Spirit, unless the word of Christ dwells in us richly. The word of Christ is both the gospel itself and the entire Scripture understood in the light of the gospel. We need to read the Scriptures daily as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, to meditate on them, to memorize them, to be increasingly filled with the word of Christ until it shapes our thoughts, attitudes and desires, until it becomes the vocabulary of our hearts and increasingly of our lips.

When the word dwells in us in this way, our time together becomes startlingly different from what it too ordinarily is: it changes the way we talk and even the way we sing. The word as fulfilled in the good news of Christ sets our hearts to singing, and turns our mourning into dancing as that word makes all things new.

### **3. Let the name of Christ direct all you do, and give thanks (3:17).**

The key to everything is to recognize that our lives are now “hidden with Christ in God.” In other words, we are now in Christ as members of his body, and Christ is now in us by his indwelling Spirit. We are caught up in Christ

and have become a part of the very life of God. We Christians do not take seriously enough our union with Christ. This is no metaphor: if we have been born anew, we have been born of God's own Spirit and joined in union with Christ. "Old things have passed away, and all things have become new." Anything less than this is not salvation as understood by the Scriptures. And so, obviously, everything must begin to change.

I am simply not my own. My body belongs to Jesus, my time, my money, my home, my stuff: it is no longer simply mine, because I am now his, and so all I have is his. We are to say to our Lord what husband and wife say to each other when they exchange rings: "With my body I honor you; all that I am I give you; all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen." Have you ever said that to the Lord? Does your life express your loving desire to keep that pledge? This, again, leads to thanksgiving for the only life worth living, life that stands fast in the face of suffering and smiles in the face of death.

## **Conclusion**

Did you notice that each of these three sections ended with a call to thanksgiving? All this we have been looking at is not law, but grace. God does not save us for walking in his ways: we walk in his ways because he has first loved us and made us his own. So the authentic Christian life is a glad and grateful response to the love and mercy of God, who reaches out to us in Jesus Christ and sets us free from brokenness and shame. He gives us the power of his own Spirit, if only we will lay hold of the gift in submissive trust, take him at his word, and begin to live as members of the body of Christ.

This is God's invitation to us this morning: Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts; let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; and let the name of Jesus Christ be your source of courage, strength and authority, his honor and glory your reason for all that you do. And in all of this, "give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

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