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November 26, 2017

Imperfect Community- Thankfulness

2 Chronicles 5:13-14: It was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, ¹⁴ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15: The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

This week, with the help of Facebook, I asked people to complete the following sentence: "To me, Thanksgiving is all about _____." The responses varied from the more joyful and light-hearted – "family and friends, food and football, laughter, sharing of memories, and a time to reconnect" --- to the socially reflective, "celebrating the truths of our history (the good as well as the bad) – and thinking critically about our place and actions within the world, being intentional about how to better demonstrate our gratitude for life and care for those things we cherish most."

Some shared honestly about struggles with big family holidays like Thanksgiving that bring with them the tension and fear of not being welcomed or accepted as you are, whether based on career or life choices, personality traits, sexual orientation or gender identity. A holiday filled with celebrating our blessings, is fraught with emotional baggage for more people than we care to admit.

Pastor Christina said that she sees thanksgiving as sort of the ultimate Holy Communion meal shared with people we love... remembering, with a grateful heart, what God has already done, celebrating with joy what God IS doing, and anticipating with hope what is yet to come.

One of my favorite responses to the crowd-sourcing this week was someone who wrote that she is thankful for the time (set aside) to share with her family, not because it means she is more thankful for them on this one specific day, because she is ALWAYS thankful for her loved ones. "The thankfulness is daily!" This spirit of LIVING THANKFULNESS daily is what our scripture this morning is calling us into. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he calls the members of his church to respond to the blessings that God pours out in abundance with generosity to others – generosity that "not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God." Paul teaches that God never blesses us for ourselves alone. God gives to us so that we can give to others. *That* is how we best show gratitude! Thanksgiving is the ultimate outcome of God's grace.

- And according to Paul, thanksgiving is a renewable resource...
 - Thanksgiving produces generosity.
 - Generosity brings a sense of abundance into our lives
 - which increases our gratitude...
 - and so on and so on...

We're used to thinking in terms of scarcity, not abundance. There's never enough to go around. Many of us are haunted by the fear that we are just a few paychecks away from falling through the cracks. We're more conscious of our scarcity than our abundance. There's never enough time to get everything done, never enough money to make us feel truly secure, never enough love for us to get our fill. You've got to hold on to what you have.

But just as the season of Thanksgiving is a time to celebrate our abundance, the spirit of Thanksgiving creates in us an abundance mind set. When we focus on the positives in our life, we feel thankful. The more thankful we feel, the more joyful we feel. And joy is contagious. It overflows. We want to share it with others.

And we're never too young to put this lesson into practice. Just ask Linda McCullough Moore, the mother of two young sons. The refrigerator in the Moore household has pictures on it of a cow and two goats. Not so unusual, perhaps. Most of us have odd stuff hanging on our refrigerator door. What is unusual about the Moore household is that the cow's name is Camera Phone. The goats are named Sega Genesis I and Sega Genesis II, names of popular communication or gaming technology.

One night, Linda Moore was watching TV with her two young sons when they saw an ad for an overseas charity for children. According to the ad, twenty dollars would feed one child for a month. Moore mentioned to her sons that they had planned on spending twenty

dollars per month on faster Internet service. Then she asked her boys to decide where the money should go. They voted unanimously for the children's charity.

After that, Moore saw new ways to help her boys develop the spirit of giving to others. Each time they wanted to make a purchase, she asked them to weigh it against sending money to charity. She obtained a catalogue from a charity that gives farm animals to people in impoverished areas. The animals can be used for meat, milk, eggs, leather. And the boys responded positively. So, instead of a camera phone, they had a picture of a cow on their refrigerator, and instead of video games, they had pictures of goats. Did the boys resent this emphasis on helping others? If so, they didn't let it show. In fact, the boys were so excited by this opportunity that they began picking up odd jobs around the neighborhood in order to raise money to give more.

The Moore family lived out the understanding that simply saying a prayer of thanksgiving is not enough: our expression of thanksgiving reaches completion when we share our gifts with others. When we share our blessings, we create thankfulness and joy in other people. And those people praise God for the gifts they receive through us, and they pray God's blessings on our lives. And God blesses us in response to their prayers. And the thankfulness and joy start all over again.

Gratitude and generosity feed on one another. Give out of gratitude and your sense of gratitude will continue to grow. No wonder Paul closed this section of his letter with these words, "Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift!"

In the words of Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest and prolific writer, "Gratitude ... goes beyond the "mine" and "yours" and claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift. In the past I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous **response** to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realize that gratitude can also be **lived as a discipline**. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy."

It is my prayer that we may all live into this Spirit of Gratitude, a Spirit of Thankfulness each day, for the big and little things in our lives, and that that spirit catches and spreads far and wide, transforming our community and world into the banquet of the Great Thanksgiving. Amen.