

The First Thanksgiving was celebrated by the Pilgrims after their first harvest in the New World in 1621. It lasted three days and was attended by 53 Pilgrims and 90 Native Americans. (It was all downhill from there.)

Thanksgiving has been a national holiday ever since Abraham Lincoln made it official in 1863. He memorialized the day with the words, "Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens." Our country was in the middle of the Civil War. I think this says a lot about the kind of person Lincoln was, about his relationship to God and about his unflinching faith in our country. He had a sense of thankfulness that lay deep in his heart.

This morning we're going to talk about what it means to be filled with thankfulness in light of our walk with God and with one another.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

### **PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9**

**Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup>do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. And the God of peace will be with you. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."**

Isn't Paul's tone like that of a man who spends his days sitting on a stump in the forest next to a gentle stream writing poetry? He seems to have nary a care in the world; everything around him is purely serene.

But such was not the case. Following Jesus, Paul had lost his reputation, his friends, and his place in Judaism as a teacher of the Law. Indeed, he often lived without shelter and food; frequently he was beaten and imprisoned.

It is not a soulful sentiment to rejoice and give thanks when one is on the mountain top, when my health is good, my home is peaceable, and my work is satisfying. But when I have been betrayed, when I've lost someone dear to me, or when my work is miserable, giving thanks is truly other worldly.

When Paul was converted from a legalistic teacher of the Law to a grace-filled follower of Jesus, everything in his world was turned upside-down. Property, reputation, and money – the things the world said gave life meaning – meant nothing to him anymore. What sustained him, what gave his life purpose was the resurrected life of his savior, Jesus Christ.

Consider what Paul said elsewhere. He wrote, **“For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Phil 1:21)**. This makes sense only when we understand that Paul's life was intimately intertwined with Christ's. He also wrote, **“whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.” (Rom 14:8)**. Paul had forsaken everything he had been for everything he would become in Christ. This was how his life was transformed.

As we heard, Paul wrote, **Philippians 4:8, “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. And the God of peace will be with you.”**

Paul never asked anyone to do anything he wasn't willing to do himself. That's why he was able to say with absolute confidence, **“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice.”**

When Paul instructs us to meditate on things that are true, noble, right, and so forth, and that we will have peace if we do so, he was telling us this works for him, so he's sure it will work for us too.

So when he wrote we should think about things that are “true,” I believe he was thinking about the truth of Jesus; when he said we should think about things that

are “right,” he was saying we should meditate on what’s right about Jesus; when he said we should contemplate whatever is “pure,” he was telling us we should think about the purity of Jesus; when he said we should think about whatever is “lovely,” he was saying we should consider the loveliness of Jesus; and when he said we should ponder whatever is “admirable,” he was talking about admiring the attributes of Christ.

I believe Paul’s meditation on Jesus’ life and ministry and words infected his way of seeing the world around him. He saw everything through Jesus’ eyes.

It is the ministry of our Lord Jesus that transforms our hearts. For me it works like this: Even though the world is drowning in lies, I remember that Jesus is “true”; he’s true to me and to you in his promise to forgive our sins and bless us with eternal life. This is the truth that has set us free.

Even though the world is filled with shame, I remember that Jesus is “noble” and that he has called you and me fellow heirs of his Kingdom.

Even though the world is dying in sin, I remember that Jesus is “right,” that is righteous. He is holy, and I was clothed in his righteousness in the waters of Holy Baptism. The world can’t take that away from me.

Even though the world’s darkness threatens to crush my spirit, I remember that Jesus is “pure,” that he was the perfect, unblemished lamb who offered himself as a sacrifice on the altar of God for me and you. This is the light that breaks through the darkness.

Even though the world has become such an ugly place in so many ways, I remember that Jesus is “lovely.” He showed me what love and graciousness are through his acceptance and forgiveness of even a sinner such as I.

And even though the world is filled with ignoble and disgraceful things which it encourages and admires, I remember that Jesus is “admirable,” for he gave his life for the world that mocked and killed him, and he rose from the grave on the third day to usher us into life eternal by his side.

I remember the song: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace."

That's how we may be thankful for everything, by seeing everything through the eyes of Jesus.

This week let us give thanks for our families and our church, our city and our country. The Lord has provided everything we need for this body and life.

This week let us give thanks for our savior, Jesus. He is our light, our life, and our love unto eternity.

And this week let us find opportunity to share the reason we are so thankful with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of the Lord. Amen.