

GIVE THANKS!!!

Sermon October 11, 2020

Scripture readings: Psalm 24 & Philippians 4:10-20

Golden verse: *"Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles."* Philippians 4: 14

Dear beloved, one of the great commandments is to give thanksgiving to God, for all He has done for us. In Psalm 100:4, we are taught to *"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name"*.

We are in Thanksgiving season, when Canadians lift up our joyful hearts and hands with gratitude to our Creator and Sustainer for everything that God gave us: what we have and what we will receive based on His promises by His amazing grace. Showing gratitude to God sounds like an easy task. But these days, when the whole world goes through a hard time because of the pandemic, staying grateful, joyful, and happy is quite hard.

As a young theologian, borrowing Apostle Paul's expression, I was *"surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses."* (Hebrews 12:1) At the beginning of my university studies, I had the great privilege to listen to those servants of Christ, ministers and lay persons, who in Communism, in 1956, had to be silenced, and for this were jailed for 7 years. They were beaten up daily, hungry and thirsty, and separated from their families, just because they loved and served our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully. In the 1980's, as I was sitting with them, listening to their stories, my heart was burning as they talked. My friend and my roommate's grandfather, Rev. Sandor (Alex) Szilagy, was one of those ministers, who were nurturing me as well on his stories. He shared with us, what he later noted in his book, that on that very last day, when he and his colleagues were released from the jail, an officer interrogated him again. This minister said to that officer: "Please show me among non-believers who, in the last seven years, was totally happy and thankful every single day. Even in jail, I was happy every single day, because I spend every day with my Lord and Saviour, who was here with me and for me.

In this Thanksgiving season, let us lift up our joyful hearts and let us show gratitude with happy and thankful hearts to our dear God for all things.

Many people have some kind of connection with God, but not all the people experienced that real joy, when a person can be in a deep personal and loving relationship with Christ Jesus, which produces gratitude. With gratitude in prayers and actions, we show our appreciation and thankfulness, returning God's kindness. Gratitude is more than just being thankful. Gratitude is an emotional attitude of grace and gratefulness for God's gifts. Scientifically it has been proved that showing gratitude makes us healthier, strengthens our emotions, helps us to cope with stress, can help you sleep better, and improves productivity. This means that when we show gratitude, we are doing ourselves a kind favour as well.

Reasons to Give God Gratitude

We, as Calvin family members, all have many reasons to give God gratitude.

In our scripture reading, we were informed that Paul was jailed for Christ for a long period of time. Some congregations made a collection and sent a person to visit with him and to bring to him clothes and food they prepared. This way, they shared Paul's troubles, and with action they showed that they belonged together. It was a very visible way of showing that they were all part of God's family.

Paul often used a Greek word SYN – *S-Y-N*, which means *TOGETHER*. Here he says to the Philippians that “you suffered with me, you worked with me, you prayed with me, we belong together as children of God” although they were more than a hundred kilometers apart from each other. You and I, we are calling God, as *OUR FATHER*, and for this we are brothers and sisters, children of God.

Dear beloved, we have so many people here in Canada and around the world who are struggling with thirst and hunger these days because of the pandemic. When we get a glass of water, we should remember that millions in Cuba have no drinking water, just what they get when very rarely it is raining. When we break a slice of bread, we should remember that they struggle to get a loaf of bread once a week. When we get in our shoes, we should remember that, in Cuba, a monthly salary is \$20 CAN and a pair of running shoes cost \$40 CAN.

And in this Thanksgiving season, we have to remember that they are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here, Paul says: *“Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.”* (Philippians 4: 14) Then he said: *“Moreover, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.”* (Philippians 4: 15-16) When, in February, our group visited those two congregations in Cuba, they told us that some congregations promised them that they will care for them, but none of those returned to them except our church through representatives of Calvin, Kitchener.

There are many ways to give gratitude to the Lord. When we sing a worship song, when we read the Bible to know more about God, when we take care of our loved ones, when we do our very best at work, we show gratitude. We show gratitude by worshipping God and serving/helping His people.

I am so happy to see people’s willingness to serve as they share. It is such a joy to interact with people who are blessed with a willingness to serve and give. God can do so much to a willing heart.

Dear beloved, it is extremely important for all of us to set ourselves up for success with starting a gratitude practice, creating a healthy routine, knowing that showing gratitude is good for our body, mind and soul. This practice might look different to everyone. I would like to encourage you to create some gratitude-goals for each day, each week, and each month. One of the best things you can do is to commit yourself to study the Bible every single day. Our Zoom services, which are now every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, will help you to spend more time with God. It would be very important to stay consistent and to make a gratitude practice into a healthy habit.

Paul mentioned that what we give is the fruit of our faith in Christ. These fruits are the proof that we are growing in faith, and the most important fruit of our faith is LOVE. Love should be manifested in giving. For our sisters and brothers in Cuba, the gifts we are sending them are extremely important, but the LOVE they feel is as important for them as our material gifts, knowing that there are

sisters and brothers in Canada who not only pray for them but also love them by sharing what they have.

Paul accepted the gift, not from Philippians, but he took it from God's hands. He concludes his thanksgiving, saying: *"To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever."* (Philippians 4:20) This helps us to understand that we are not making a huge favour to those to whom we give. We just handing them over what we already received from God.

What do we need to be good stewards?

First, we have to take seriously what Psalm 24:1 is teaching us: *"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it."* We belong to God as well. We are Gods' stewards. For good stewardship, we need a heart, which we already placed in God's hand to love and serve Him. We need active hands to do God's will. We need sharp eyes to see who needs me and my help.

I have three questions and let's respond to these here and now:

- Are you taking it seriously what God says, that NOTHING is yours, but you got EVERYTHING from God?
- Are you always ready to love, serve and share, to handle over what you received from God?
- Are you confident, that God's care for you will continue, and will provide for you with EVERYTHING you will need?

May the Lord help you, and me, and all of us to grow our faith, to increase our gratitude, and to serve others with kindness. All of this resulting in a positive mindset will help us to live a beautiful life filled with greater contentment and joy.

Showing gratitude to God is what Thanksgiving is all about.

As Paul says: *"All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God."*
2 Corinthians 4:15

The question is this: how are you going to make this Thanksgiving season more about showing gratitude to God?