

Sermon for Sunday, July 16, 2017 – “Gratitude”

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 16, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Tom Buresh

First Reading: 1 Kings 3:3-14; Psalm 111; Second Reading: Ephesians 5:15-20; Gospel: John 6: 51-58

Always and for everything - give thanks. I'm sure we all have some trouble in really believing that verse from Ephesians. We all have had tough times in our lives when we ask, "Why me God" or Why that person God?" It just seems that if certain things didn't happen in our lives in the past that things would be much easier for us now. Well, today is now and now is the part of our life we should be living; that is, we should not be living in the past. But yet, there are times the past can help... Well, let me continue.

This morning I would like to introduce you to someone who fortunately came into my life years ago. Because of that introduction, although it certainly took a few years to accept him, I am much more grateful for all the things that have happened in my life. So, let me introduce to you my friend, "Gratitude".

Gratitude was not always a part of my life, you know. In my very young years I just enjoyed all the things my family and friends gave me but then as I became old enough to start understanding, my Mom took an active part in my first introduction to "gratitude". She would ask me after church, "Did you thank your uncle John for the gum he gave you after church this morning?" "Did you thank your uncle Richard for taking you with him to the softball game last night" I would respond that I didn't need to for they could tell how happy I was to get the gum and how excited I was to go to the ballgame. But of course I said "thank you" anyway to make Mom happy.

After that I started to understand why gratitude showed up every time we ate; "Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, let these gift to us be Blessed!" and every time I went to bed, "Blessed Savior dear, be always near, keep me from evil harm and fear." And of course we couldn't have Christmas gifts opened or a birthday party without gratitude being there. "Make for sure you thank aunt Libbie for the gift", my mother would remind me.

But even after all that, I still didn't understand the importance of having such a guest with me in "ALL" things.

Well, the years flew by and soon I was packing up to go to college. Finally, I thought, I can be on my own and do and say (or not say) what I wanted to. But yet, as I packed I heard "Gratitude" say, " Don't forget to pack that Bible that your grandma gave you for Christmas a couple of years ago". So, I did and off I went.

It was a tough start to a new life as I grew up on a farm and was the only kid in my grade in country school until grade 5. Even though I was always the top student in my class all those years. Anyway, I met Connie after my freshman year and we got married my senior year. I got a job teaching math by Fort Dodge and we moved to a small town and life was good.

Then one Monday evening while I watched my Vikings play football, Connie seemed to think something was important enough for me to stop watching. Well, I guess she was right, for as we drove to the local hospital and then a few hours later saw that little baby boy in my wife's arms I knew how grateful I was for, well for about everything. And then tears of joy came two years later when Connie got her sweet little girl and then in two years, another little girl. Yes, gratitude was there and we loved it!

Then one morning as I was about to leave for work, the phone rang. It was my mother and I could tell she was upset. My uncle Kenny had fallen off a ladder as he was cleaning the leaves out of the rain gutters and hit his head on a picnic table. I knew his house was just one story and he couldn't have been but 8-10 feet up so even though I was concerned, I felt OK as I left for work. The next morning my mother called again; this time in tears. My uncle Kenny had died.

On my drive to work, all day long and on my drive home, all I could feel was anger and all I could think about was why, why, why? And then, when I got home that afternoon and Connie met me at the door with a hug, but someone else was there to greet me as well. Of all people to be there at a time like this, there was Gratitude. "Your timing is pretty bad to come at a time like this. Just go away and come back some other time - when we are in the mood to celebrate something.

But, it didn't take long to understand why he was there. For Connie and I started to talk about uncle Kenny and how grateful we were that he had been a part of our lives. The beginning of my senior year he was still a bachelor and I stayed with him for six weeks as I did my student teaching in a nearby town.

It was shortly after, when he was around 50 he met a special lady in his life. We were so excited for him. He had me get tickets of a concert at CY Stevens in Ames for the four of us. After we said our goodbye's in the parking lot he

started to drive away but then stopped and backed up. He said he forgot to pay me for their tickets and handed me some money. When I got in our car I could see he had given me twice the amount of the tickets. He knew a young college student could use a little extra money.

I sang at their wedding and he sang at ours. They had a little girl to go with his new three stepchildren and the stories went on and on. Then, it really hit me, I really began to know and unconditionally love my friend, Gratitude.

Oh, we may still have a little spat or disagreement once in a while, but if we do, he reminds me quite quickly to take that bible that my grandma gave me years ago and turn to the book of Ephesians chapter 5 and read the word of God that is so true in any place or any time of your life.