

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
27th October 2020

READINGS

Many experiences, smells, and sights can produce memories of times past. We recently talked about this idea of memories in our Sunday night *Gratitude* discussion on Zoom. We were asked to think of a memory that reminded us of a time of abundance. I was reminded of that exercise when our furniture and items arrived from the U.S. recently. As I sat on our worn brown sofa that I always wanted to replace at home, I suddenly felt warm and cozy. I was so glad we had kept it and I could sit on it again. As our dining room table was set up by the movers, I began to remember all the meals, discussions, and festive times around the table as a family. Then when I started to unpack books, I began to remember the people who gave them to me or who had taught me at different times in my life. I had images and memories of my family, friends, students, parishioners and so many people who were important to me. I realized what an abundance of relationships and experiences I have had in my life. I felt incredible gratitude even in the chore of unpacking.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NRSV)

This scripture is one that we have been meditating on each week in our Zoom discussion. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he was not challenging them to put on a plastic smile and pretend that life was easy. Rather he was encouraging them to find joy in the journey of their lives – the good, the bad, the bumpy, the smooth...in all the ups and downs and wiggly roads they travelled. I wonder if we read this verse in light of a journey, will it help us to remember that whatever comes our way is something we can face with God? Joy is possible even in the midst of sadness because it is a gift, a peace, a contentment, not a delirious high that means we are 'happy'. I certainly was not 'happy' to be unpacking all our things that arrived (and am still unpacking) but I did feel joy that God has blessed us so abundantly, as I remembered all the people and places that had touched our lives along the way through those items.

Truthfully, thankfulness is not my first choice. When the movers were arriving all I could think about was having to pack up and do this again in a year! I was worried how we would manage the day ahead with the baby and with the trio having online classes and with me having a Church Law online class all the next day! Yet we began and ended the day with prayer and gratitude, not because that was our first thought but because we knew God would get us through the journey, and the Lord is doing just that!

What might we need to change in our lives in order to find gratitude and pray through our journeys each day? How can we give thanks as we face what is before us?

For me I need reminders! When I was packing up this summer, I realized how many items I had collected over the years to remind me of Scotland. But now I was going to be living in Scotland, so what should I do with these lovely things I had collected? I shared many of the keepsakes. One particular set of mugs I decided to share with friends and keep one for myself so that I could remember to pray for them. It was so fun when I opened up the box with the one lonely mug! I remembered my friends who had the others, gave thanks for them and placed the matching one in my office. I am hoping that little reminder each

day will encourage me to give thanks for the relationships God has given me, even those that are across an ocean!

When the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua: 'Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, and command them, "Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight."'

Joshua 4:1-3 (NRSV)

REFLECTION

The Israelites were about to cross over the river Jordan into the promised land. What fear and uncertainty they must have had as they contemplated crossing that river. They had to step out and follow God, and as they did the waters did not overcome them. These 12 stones for each of the 12 tribes were meant to be a memorial to remind them not just of where they had come from and where they were going but also of who was leading them. They were to share this story with their children in the years to come that God had led them to the Promised land! The work of the Lord was to be remembered with gratitude!

That memorial of stones must have brought up a memory for them every time they saw it. The children who were born after the journey would have the memory of the story they had been told. I felt a bit of what the children might have been feeling as I unwrapped a Snow White book my mom had received as a child and remembered my great uncle who had given it to her. Their family was very poor so the book held extra meaning. I was not the one given it, but it still was special to me to unpack the book. I was filled with gratitude for my great uncle's relationship with my mom and remembered them both with joy.

Not everyone has the same measure of abundance in their lives. Some struggle to remember good times with a parent or even a safe place as a child. Life can be at times violent and chaotic, and the memories that arise might not offer comfort. So, what can we do as Christians to share our abundance?

We cannot take away the sting of hurt another might feel, and it would be patronizing and unkind to just encourage them to pray about it. Rather, we can journey through life with others and share their pain, walk beside them in their struggles, and sacrifice our time to share love and care.

As Christians, some of the most precious giving comes not from offering our resources but our time and our care. During this time of Harvest will you consider giving out of the abundance of love God has given you? Will you take a moment to allow God to bring a person to mind that has some extra need for love? A person that might need a friend or someone to do their shopping or phone them up and listen to the journey of their day. One way you can participate in giving thanks this time of year is to allow God to use you in the lives of others to bless them and share in sacrificial ways.

I have one or two friends that are hard to love...you know what I mean. They can be a challenge, or they seem to need more of my time than others. I am sure others may think

of me as 'that difficult friend' too! Just recently one of these more challenging friends contacted me. I was very tired and for a moment I wanted to pretend I had not seen the text. Yet, I pushed through my tiredness, and reached out to her. I had an opportunity to encourage her as she went through a very difficult time and was glad I sacrificed some 'me' time to be there for her.

We cannot always say 'yes' but if we find ourselves always saying 'no' then it might be that we are needing to talk with God about being more generous and sacrificial with our time. It is hard to do and yet it is free! It is a challenge, and yet we receive so much back in the end!

'Gratitude is social...It is about being *with* one another, *in* life together. It is the thread of nature and neighbor, the seemingly fragile strands of gifts and goodness that weave our lives together.' (**Butler Bass, 2018, p. 95**).

Sit with these words for a moment.

How can gratitude be social? I would love to hear your thoughts! But for the moment, a few of my own will have to do! Sharing love and welcoming someone else into friendship and walking with them in life is a way of sharing the abundance of grace God has given us. We may not always be grateful, and we may struggle to find 'joy' in every situation, but being willing to open ourselves to gratitude and sharing it with another will not just impact the other person but will transform our lives as well.

This week, with whom will you share your 'joy' and your journey? What a different world we would find if we all brought the abundance of self to the table and welcomed someone else to join us! I look forward to hearing your stories of how you brought in the harvest of loving others this week!

Julia

PRAYER

Loving and Creative God,
We give you thanks for the journey of life.
Please give us joy along the way.
Thank you for the struggles,
Thank you for the pain,
Thank you for the people you send to walk beside us,
Thank you that we can do the same.
As we remember the ways we have been blessed,
Help us to bless others with our time, our presence, and our care.
May we find ways to jog our memories into thankfulness.
May we bring in the harvest of grace and love.
May we welcome others to the table,
So that we might feast together of the abundance you
have provided each of us.
Your grace is lavish indeed!
In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

