



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
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Midweek Devotion

March 24, 2020

“Give Thanks in All Circumstances”

Rev. David K. Groth

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“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

*Every day, Everywhere, By Everyone,...sharing
the grace of the Good Shepherd.*

Collect: Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

There are at least two hundred occasions in the New Testament where we are urged to give God thanks and praise, even when there don't appear to be any reasons for being glad and grateful.

Over and over again, Paul urges his readers to assume a basic posture of gratitude. It's almost as if things will be better regardless of what's happening, if only you can express gratitude. I believe there's truth to that.

Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, and I'm not sure we would want to trade places with them. They were a tiny minority, without political, economic or social influence. They were misunderstood and hated for their faith and therefore objects of intense persecution. They were being beaten and imprisoned by the authorities and, understandably, they were terrified and discouraged. Paul encourages them to remain steadfast in the face of such persecution by focusing on God's grace. He presents Christ as their hope of salvation, and then, just a few verses from the end, he writes, "be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

To be joyful and grateful in *all* circumstances? Anyone can be grateful when a child is born or a promotion is given or an illness is cured. Big deal, Paul seems to be saying. Anyone can do that. But Paul urges us to be grateful in *all* circumstances. Paul's argument is that the Christian's joy and gratitude should *not* be dependent on circumstances, because joy and gratitude come from what God has done for us in Jesus. The death and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation has already happened, and it transcends everything else. Paul is urging us as Christians to

stand out as different from the rest of society.

So, what is there to be grateful for in the midst of this pandemic?

- We can be grateful that the Coronavirus doesn't target infants and children. Through the centuries, most of the pandemics have.
- We can be grateful that we live in a land of ample food. We complain about what's not available at the grocery store, but there's a whole lot that still is.
- We can be grateful for those working on the front lines of this epidemic, doctors and nurses and paramedics who risk their own health to serve us.
- We can be grateful for the people who are stocking the shelves at the grocery store and wiping down the carts, giving you change, and risking their own health to serve us.
- We complain about the shortage of paper towels. I think there are plenty of people in the world who would be glad just to have clean water and consistent electricity and access to insulin and aspirin.
- We can be grateful for this technology that enables us to communicate, even though we cannot assemble. It helps us stay connected to one another and to God's Word.
- We can be grateful for all the meals families are having together. (By the way there's all kinds of evidence that that is one of the best things you can do for your children, just sitting down and eating together. It has an impact on their grades, drinking, drug use and other risky behaviors. So please don't waste this opportunity by watching T.V. during dinner hour. And please don't have a staggered meal where everyone fend for themselves when they get hungry. No, make it a point to eat together, and say a little prayer of thanks before you begin eating. Otherwise, Luther said, we're little different than pigs at the trough.)

. The point is, there are many reasons for gratitude in the midst of this pandemic. And of course, the greatest reason to be grateful is that we live in a world already redeemed by Jesus Christ on the cross. In Holy Baptism he has given you the gifts of his death and resurrection without cost or merit. That gift transcends everything else. Even if the worst happens to you or me, we know where we are going, and it is, after all, our ultimate goal to get there.

So, *“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* Amen.