

## **Matthew 6:24-34**

<sup>24</sup>“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”<sup>25</sup>“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”<sup>26</sup>Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?<sup>27</sup>And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?<sup>28</sup>And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.<sup>30</sup>But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?<sup>31</sup>Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’<sup>32</sup>For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.<sup>33</sup>But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.<sup>34</sup>“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

## **Being Thankful November 18, 2018**

One of my favorite Thanksgiving stories is of the elderly man in Phoenix who calls his son in New York and says, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing; 45 years of misery is enough."

"Pop, what are you talking about?" the son screams.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the old man says. "We're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her." Then he hangs up.

Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like heck, they're getting divorced," she shouts, "I'll take care of this." She calls Phoenix immediately, and screams at the old man, "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?"

The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. "Okay," he says, "They're coming for Thanksgiving and paying their own way."

I hope your Thanksgiving won't have this much drama in it. It may, of course, you never know when families get together. Anything can happen. But as we approach the Thanksgiving Holiday, I thought it would be good for us to take some time to remember the things we are thankful for. To express our thankfulness to God and one another, and to share some stories of being thankful that might prime the pump for us if we are not feeling particularly thankful this year.

Like many of you this past Thursday morning we woke up to trees covered in ice and some really interesting weather for November. Fortunately, we didn't lose power which often happens in our mountain communities. But we were prepared for it as I'm sure many of you were. We filled up a few pots with water and made sure our flashlights were where we could find them. I ground the coffee beans ahead of time and knew where the old stove top coffee pot was if we needed it. We could manage alright if the power went out, at least for a day or so. But that morning as I sat drinking my delicious and warm cup of coffee made in our electric coffee maker, I was just so thankful. Thankful for electricity, for food, for shelter from the storm, for warm and clean

clothes, for a hot breakfast, for socks, for so many things that we often just overlook because we expect them to always be there. We have so many things that we just take for granted, don't we?

And It gets me wondering what I could live without if need be and what is really enough for us? I often feel like I have so much that I am not only ungrateful but forgetful as well. I forget how much I already have and don't remember to be thankful for. I have clothes in my closet that I haven't worn for at least two years; shoes as well. I have books and music that haven't seen the light of day for as long as I can remember. I have abundance which sometimes I believe is a result of my own doing and which somehow, I deserve. Sometimes we just forget to be thankful.

Now, we are about to approach the most tempting time of the year, where getting 'material things' are concerned. We will be worrying about all the sales on Black Friday and all the gifts we want to buy for loved ones and all the gifts we hope someone will buy for us. We may be on a quest to acquire the biggest bang for our buck and maybe even then some. We will be blinded by the siren call for more and more stuff all in the name of Christmas and good bargains!

So, I find this passage from Matthew to be troubling to me as we approach this season of lustful consumerism. It sounds somewhat cautionary doesn't it? Maybe it will temper our greed and passion for acquiring things and maybe cause us to stop and consider what we already have.

Jesus reminds us that we have enough; that whatever it is we are seeking at the marketplace or the hall of fame, is not going to satisfy us for very long. That worrying about what we are going to eat or what we are going to wear or what we are going to achieve is not the most important thing in our lives. Striving for these things will not satisfy, but that seeking what God desires, God's Kingdom, will bring us the things that we most need. It reminds me of that hymn, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, And all these things shall be added unto you. Allelu, alleluia.*

Now that doesn't mean that we aren't frugal with our money. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to get the best deal with the limited resources that we have. It doesn't mean that we don't strive to achieve our best with the talents and gifts we have. But at the end of the day, all those 'things' will not fill you with lasting joy and they won't take away your worry. Particularly if you are not thankful for them.

In an article in the Christian Century Pastor Martin B. Copenhaver, suggests that the more we have, the more likely we are to say, "Thanks for nothing." He also goes on to say that, "There is something about offering thanks that makes us whole." And he shared the following story from the book *365 Thank Yous*, written by author John Kralik which was wonderfully insightful for me.

Kralik writes about writing a thank-you note a day for an entire year. And he didn't resolve to write all of those thank-you notes at a time when he was feeling particularly grateful. In fact, it was at a particularly low time in his life. His small law firm was losing money and losing its lease. He was going through a difficult divorce. He lived in a small, stuffy apartment where he often slept on the floor under an ancient air conditioner. He was middle-aged, overweight, and at the end of his rope.

Then one day, he got lost on a mountain hike and didn't know how to get home. By the time he found his way down the mountain he had a plan. He would write a thank-you note each day for a year. He writes, "My only problem: Did I have anything to be grateful for? The way my life was going, I hardly thought so."

But he got started, by writing notes to the people close to him, his family and friends. Then it got harder. "One day," he writes, "I just couldn't think of anybody to thank." He stopped at his regular Starbucks, where the barista greeted him by name, "John, your usual venti?" with a big smile.

Kralik reflected, "I thought, this is really kind of a great gift in this day and age of impersonal relationships, that someone had cared enough to learn my name and what I drank in the morning." So, he wrote the barista a thank-you note; each day a day of thanksgiving. Kralik says the experience of expressing thanks day in and day out changed the way he approached life. It even got him to church:

"I had considered myself something of an atheist for years, but I started going to this church [near the end of that year]. The music was plentiful, delivered with...genuine enthusiasm. The dominant message was that grace was still available. To everyone. Even to me. I can deal with that, I thought. Through the process of writing thank-you notes, I had developed a notion of being blessed with grace."

Pastor Copenhaver concludes by saying, "Those whose lives are marked with gratitude, infused with thankfulness, join in the echo of grace and receive a particular blessing reserved for them. They are made well. They are made whole."

And I've come to experience that when I am grateful and thankful, my heart begins to long for other things, perhaps the things that God desires. That when we give thanks for our lives God shows us the things that we should desire...love, acceptance, serving one another, feeding the poor and needy, justice, mercy, grace...thankfulness. That the Good News is, the desires of our hearts are the desires God gives us and not the other way around.

As we find ourselves bombarded with the possibilities of great bargains this Advent and Christmas season, I invite you to pause. To take a deep breath. To step back and remember all the things you have to be thankful for. To consider, what is enough and what is too much, as you continue to be good and faithful stewards of all that God has blessed you with. And maybe you too will find it easier to say 'Thank You' to someone each day or do something even crazier, like letting your thankfulness lead you into a caring ministry for others or seeing your place in the Kingdom differently than before.

Hopefully, you have noticed that in each bulletin today is a Thank You card. And what I'm asking you to do today is to take a moment right now and write down some of the things you are thankful for. And in a little while when we sing our hymn of response, I invite you to come forward and put that card on the communion table. And if you are okay with it, I would like to read some of the things you are thankful for at lunch today, so if you don't want me to do that just hang on to your card and keep it as a reminder to be thankful in the days to come.

I've asked Gail/Whitney to play something while you take a minute to write and then we will close today by sharing in the Litany of Gratitude which is on the insert in your bulletin. So just take a minute and write down as many things as you can think of that you are thankful for.

Please join me as we read responsively.



***Litany of Gratitude***

*Generous God, for the abundance of your blessings to us day by day and year by year,  
We give you our thanks.*

*For the simple pleasures of life: for garden harvests, coffee conversation, and familiar surroundings, for health  
and strength to appreciate the wonder of life, for needs met and desires fulfilled,  
We give you our thanks.*

*For foods distributed to nourish body and spirit, for homes which supply shelter, which nurture order and beauty, and offer hospitality,*

***We give you our thanks.***

*With hearts that forgive as freely as you have forgiven, with enthusiasm of spirit for the gift of life, with music which declares your everlasting goodness, with prayers for mutual understanding and peace,*

***We worship you with joy.***

*With creative pursuits which contribute our God-given talents, with words which honor you as Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit, with time volunteered and dedicated to service in church and community, with years committed to extending the love of Jesus Christ,*

***We worship you with joy.***

*With gifts of money which reach farther than we can manage ourselves, with deeds done in service of neighbor and stranger, with holy days set apart to celebrate your goodness and grace, with family and friends distant and nearby,*

***We worship you, God, with grateful hearts and joyful spirits.***

***Alleluia. Amen.***

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