

Nov 21, 2021 **Thanksgiving Sunday~Count Your Blessings** Rev. Gina Hendrickson

Two weeks ago, I preached on just vs 1 from this passage from Paul's letter to the disciples in Ephesus. There is so much here and I wanted to go back as it's a powerful Word for us on Thanksgiving Sunday.

Let's hear from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, 1:15-19 (NRSV)

*I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,  
and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you  
as I remember you in my prayers.*

*I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,  
may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him,  
so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened  
you may know what is the hope to which he has called you,  
what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,  
and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe,  
according to the working of his great power.*

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

My friends, it's Thanksgiving week... Time to count your blessings.

**\*\*If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead  
& a place to sleep...  
*you are richer than 75 percent of this world of ours.***

**\*\*If you have money in the bank, cash in your wallet  
& spare change in a dish some place ...  
*you are among the top 8 percent of the Earth's wealthiest people.***

**\*\*If you woke up this morning with more health than illness ...  
*you are more fortunate than the million plus who will not survive this week.***

**\*\*If you have never experienced the danger of battle,  
the loneliness of imprisonment,  
the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation ...  
*you are ahead of 700 million people in the world.***

**\*\*If you can attend this worship service, or any other religious-related meeting,  
without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death ...  
*you are fortunate. Billions of people in the world cannot.***

My friends, when looked at it this way...

It's not hard for us to count our blessings, is it?

Most of us could quickly & easily jot down a rather lengthy list of blessings, including:

Thanks for family, for friends, for food, for clothing, thanks for cars, for a home, for a job, for health, for our church, and so on.

---But think about this.

\*If we follow this logic, then it means that if we lack these things, if we lack these **things**... then we cannot give thanks.

In other words, we can count our blessings only if we have stuff to count. Right?

And this fits in right with the kind of mentality that we live & breathe in our society ...a culture of consumerism.



--In previous years, I've seen folks camping out—literally in tents— for days in front of Walmarts, Macy's & Best Buys across the country to get the newest PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X or iPhone 13 Pro Max.

Now, I just got the iPhone 12 in August; it replaced my 6s Plus...

Which both my daughters told me was an antique!

BUT you know what? My 12 is already the "old" model 3 mos later!

Our obsession for "stuff"—including the newest, hottest gadgets— consumes our culture; so...

How can we count our blessings if we don't have the newest iPhone or the Lexus in the garage or a 4K Ultra HD Smart LED TV? OR...you fill in the blank.

How can we count our blessings if we don't have these things?

Today's Scripture lesson challenges us to think differently,

The Apostle Paul actually encourages us to give thanks for...well...for **nothing**.

In fact, in typical Paul fashion in just 5 short verses,  
he offers us the example of his own thanksgiving for nothing...nothing at all—  
not one physical, material, tangible thing.

Instead, Paul gives constant thanks for that which are not things; as read earlier—

**SLIDE**

**Faith ~ Love ~ Wisdom  
Revelation ~ Hope  
God's Inheritance ~ God's Power**

- Paul gives thanks for **faith** in the Lord Jesus,
- He gives thanks for **love** toward the saints,
- Thanks for a **spirit of wisdom and revelation**,
- Thanks for **enlightened hearts filled with hope**,
- Thanks for the **riches of God's glorious inheritance** and finally...
- Paul gives thanks for the immeasurable greatness of God's **power**. (*Eph 1:15-19*)

None of these blessings can be seen, touched, purchased or possessed - like food, clothing, toys, cars or homes. And yet, they are the greatest gifts we could ever receive.

~To give thanks for the non-tangibles, or  
~To give thanks while engulfed in a culture of consumerism,  
~To give thanks amidst despair and suffering in a pandemic...  
is what Scripture calls **praise**.

Praise is the recognition that it is all about God and not about me.

Praise is the recognition that it is all about God and not about us. Amen?

\*\*Helen Keller, deaf and blind author and activist, once said that

“The best and most beautiful things cannot be seen or even touched;  
they must be felt with the heart.

*The best and most beautiful things cannot be seen or even touched;  
they must be felt with the heart.*

She continues, it is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

Helen Keller's insight is right in line with what the apostle Paul wrote in his

Second Letter to the Corinthians:

*"We look not at what can be seen, but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal" 2 Cor 4:18*

It is the unseen that is eternal. What is essential is invisible to the eye.

**This** is what Paul is giving thanks for in today's Scripture lesson...

a lesson for us on this Sunday before Thanksgiving.

- Thanks for the non-tangibles.
- Thanks for the things that cannot be seen, or touched, purchased or possessed.
- Thanks for...well...nothing!

\*\*Now again...

This approach to Thanksgiving runs counter to conventional wisdom, and it refuses to fall into step with the swarm of consumers that will surge into shopping malls this Friday to begin the Christmas buying binge.



"Black Friday," they call it - the biggest shopping day of the year. It's not black because it's bad, according to merchants—but because they count on it to turn the red in their books to black. From deficit to profit... They should call it "Green Friday," the color of money.

But today, just 4 days before Thanksgiving...

I ask that we truly think about the perspective of the apostle Paul.

~Paul doesn't give thanks for gold jewelry, PlayStations, leather jackets, computer games and Blue Ray Discs.

~Paul refuses to focus his gaze on the things that can be seen, because he knows that these **“things”** are temporary.

~Instead, he looks only at the essential & eternal things that are invisible to the eye. When Paul counts his blessings, he lists absolutely nothing you can buy, and nothing you can own – Remember Paul lists: faith, love, wisdom, revelation, hope, God's inheritance, and God's power.

\*\*So Paul starts with the big ones...he gives thanks for **faith and love**.

*"I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you" (1:15).*

Paul knows that the sign of true success is not a Lexus, or a house in the Hamptons, or a job with a six-figure salary.

Instead, success is being a person who trusts Christ completely, and who loves all people consistently. Faith and Love. There are no 2 greater gifts to receive or give than these...

As our nation—

Continues to find its way after more contentious elections...

Continues to find our way through COVID19 realities...

Continues to navigate fear and division among so many...

Faith and love are what we must fix our gaze upon! Amen?

Faith and love are gifts that keep on giving:

Our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior makes us right with God,

Right with our families and our communities,

Right with each other here in church and right with the world! Amen?

**Love is the ground of our being...**

it is the core of who we are as a disciple...

it is the driving force of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and

poured into a hurting and needy world through the Holy Spirit.

Faith and love alive within the heart of each believer

is made real and tangible through you and me...

Each and every one of us...as we help, serve & care for all the saints.

Blessed to be a blessing!

**\*\*First Church you know this!**

This congregation is filled with blessings

that are poured out to a hurting and broken world!

**\*Ministry initiatives that feed the hungry & feed souls—**

both physically & spiritually—

Through our food pantry collections, Bible studies and 1<sup>st</sup> Light Pre-School.

**\*Your care for each other through the highs and lows that each day brings,**

reveals what it means to be a faith community...

A family of faith who love unconditionally.

Paul is looking directly at you today as he counts his blessings...

*I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,*

*and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks **for you**...*

**\*\*Paul also gives thanks for a spirit of **wisdom and revelation** (v. 17),**

which he prays will come out of our ever-expanding relationship

with God through Christ.

--This spirit of wisdom opens our eyes to what God is planning for us, and  
For the church, the nation and the world.

Wisdom & revelation helps us to see that there is nothing richer or more valuable  
than a life in communion with God, with each other and our community.

~This is why we are working with The Unstuck Group  
to develop God's new vision and **hope** for us.

~This is why our TUG Leadership Team is faithfully preparing a Vision Draft  
To help our church discern God's wisdom & revelation to live and serve  
As a beacon of **hope** for a time such as this.

~This is why we give thanks that 6 new people felt called by God's hope  
to become a part of this church family.

~This is why we are blessed to be a blessing to help all of God's beloved  
know what is the hope to which God has called them.

It is also with this spirit of wisdom and revelation that we can finally grasp  
the riches of **God's glorious inheritance** (v. 18),  
a heavenly inheritance far more valuable than stocks or bonds  
or savings accounts or real estate.

Life eternal is something we gratefully and faithfully await...  
but can also glimpse and experience in this world, now...today.

Friends...

--Our **inheritance** through Christ can bring peace & comfort to our souls  
when grief has engulfed us or fear threatens to divide us.

--Our inheritance through Christ can bring joy & **hope**  
when faced with the loss of a job or the reality  
that one's paycheck can't cover the bills for this month.

--Our inheritance through Christ can bring love when we've been betrayed,  
or hurt by someone we love.

Oh my siblings in Christ,

\*How do you count your blessings for the riches of our Lord's glorious inheritance?

\*\*The final invisible gift to be thankful for is  
the immeasurable greatness of **God's power**,

--This is a power that has raised Jesus Christ from the dead  
& seated him in the heavenly places.

--A power that has put Jesus in a place of ultimate authority,  
far above every earthly ruler—be it king, president, tyrant or CEO—  
not only in this age but also in the age to come,  
so that **everything** on earth is now under the soles of Christ's feet,  
as Paul says through verses 19-22 of this 1<sup>st</sup> chapter.

But the best part is **this**: God's amazing power is at work in those of us who believe, and this power is experienced as we take part in the life of the body of Christ, that body of believers known as the Christian church (vv. 19, 23).

It doesn't really matter how much wealth or power or prestige or personnel  
or inventory or square footage, OR STUFF we control in this world,  
\*Because our greatest influence comes through our work as disciples of Christ  
Our faithful...loving...work to a hurting and needy world.

- It is as followers of Jesus that we experience the divine  
and the power of God that fills all things, including us,  
which can then flow through us to others.
- It is as followers of Jesus that we are able to endure incredible hardship and overcome  
enormous personal obstacles.
- It is as followers of Jesus that we are able to share the love, grace, hope, peace  
and forgiveness of our Lord.
- It is as followers of Jesus that we are able to step out in mission  
and share the gospel in both our words and our deeds.

Friends, none of these are a "**thing**," in a material sense.

But whether we are rich or poor, homeowners or homeless,  
working or unemployed,  
we have access to an amazing set of essential, eternal, unseen treasures.

Friends...it is time to count our blessings! Amen?



~Let us praise God today and in all the days leading up to Thanksgiving  
for all that God has generously given us...  
Countless, abundant blessings.

~May we thank God today for the non-tangibles...

~Thanks for the things that cannot be seen,  
cannot be touched,  
cannot be purchased or possessed.

So...Thanks for **nothing**...and we praise You, O God, for EVERYTHING!

Amen and Amen.