

Sunday, October 10, 2021

Psalm 126 | Timothy 2:1-7 | Matthew 6:25-34

“Thankful Words”

We continue in our “Words, words and actions” sermon series with today’s focus being “thankful words.”

This past growing season in southwestern Ontario was very different from the western wheat fields and Alberta beef farms. In one area there was a lot of rain and in the other cattle could not graze on the dry desert-like pastures. This of course will be reflected in food prices this winter specifically for beef and for grains. However, Eastern farmers assisted western farmers by providing food for the cattle until they were large enough for round up. This is not unusual as this situation has arisen in past years when feed was not available for other types of livestock. One can only imagine the look on Western farmers when bales of food arrived for their cattle. Appreciation, gratitude and thanks overwhelmed many of these farmers were helped out by strangers. Gratitude, thanksgiving and appreciation is what we too must offer this day for when we sit down to eat our special dinners, no matter what it consists of we need to offer our thanks. For there are many people who will not eat at all today. Food and all the various food products are not the only items for which we should be grateful for this day, but often it is the most visible on this holiday weekend that is really a secular gathering to eat too much!

Throughout history including Biblical history there have been times of famine and times of plenty. We might recall the cry of the people when Moses led them into the desert towards their promised land. God heard this cry for food and provided manna and quail each day. Joseph’s family left their home land to go to Egypt for food and then discovered that he was in charge of the crops and its distribution. During the exile again there was little food but when God restored the fortunes and they returned to grow their food. At the time of harvest, there was much rejoicing as they carried sheaves which would produce food for the months ahead. The people gave thanks to God for the blessings they received. We are called to do the same.

86400 seconds—that is how many seconds there are in day. God gave you a gift of 86400 seconds today. Have you use one of them to say Thank You to God? This is a question that William Arthur Ward asks. Just think about this for a moment- 86400 seconds 24 hours and what have you received in this time? Let us recap some of these last moments—hot water, food, clear running water, bed, clothes warm home, and people whom you have spoken with this morning-whether in person or on telephone; a radio, television, a car and what do we think about all of this? Sometimes we just take it for granted that we deserve it, earned it and worked for it. But all good things come from God and God has inspired you to be able to have these good things. But have you stopped to say that most profound prayer, Thank you?

Yes, it is Thanksgiving weekend, the Canadian tradition of gathering safely together and eating a good meal. It is a time to fill up the fridge and freezer with food and leftovers and to take time to reflect upon the blessings and the gifts we often do not even realize that we have received. But for many people this gathering of family with food is not relaxing at all. There is a sense of worry- whether the turkey is cooked or too dry, whether the potatoes have enough butter, or even if the gravy is lumpy. There are not matters to worry about! Because as Jesus stated, "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

Yes, we see the birds flying around between rain showers in this time of year. But they are not worried nor do they put food away into barns. Birds will be fed because God will look after them. And just think- you are more valuable than they are. So why are we worrying? God will supply all that we need, but we must work collaboratively with God to receive it.

We cannot add one hour to our life because it is up to God to call us home in His time. So why are we worried about the little things? Yes, we need food to live, clothing to keep warm when it is cold and shelter in which to be protected from weather, but why do we worry about these? Because it is in our nature to care to have feelings extended to others, even though the amount of our worrying will never change a thing. We are not in control, God is. And so God says, do not worry. We are to look to God's kingdom first; that is, we are to search for Christ, so that we might live the way of the Spirit. We are to live with a clear heart, to live with the hope of living right according to Jesus and to not be afraid.

Since the pandemic began, there have been many moments of fear, miscommunication, misunderstanding, and conflicting ways to deal with isolation and loneliness. There have been times when being alone has been tough- yes you can zoom, talk on phones or text now, but to there are people who are truly afraid of what is to come and many people have wondered where God has been. As we worship God and offer our thanks for his blessings, there have been people who have asked why we should give thanks to God at all. This virus created havoc and caused the world to grieve as a whole, where was God in all of it? Was he with the workers watching the many people breathe their last? What about the truck drivers who drove and could not be with families when they came home? Was God in the labs around the world as people worked diligently to come up with not one but several vaccines that have stopped the spread of the virus? Was God within the hearts of believers who state again and again- we will get through this, we are in this together, and don't be afraid? When we reflect on what has occurred in these last months worldwide, we need to stop and not question God's presence but to offer thanks to others and to God.

Around the city there have been many signs posted thanking the essential workers, front line staff working in hospitals or those driving transport to market our goods in order that we might have food. There have been statements offering thanks to teachers for their innovative work teaching on line never thinking this would really happen. Not to mention churches going online and still offering pastoral support. People of all backgrounds and vocations shifted in their workplaces and did more than what was thought possible. So we

need to thank each other for being able to do what was done-together. As a result of this, we are now on the threshold of ushering in a new world. A world where debit and credit cards were used more than the exchange of cash. Clothing stores still are unsure whether people will buy their goods as we have become more aware of consumerism and the need for less.

How could we forget the images of empty streets, people staying at home and worrying about what was to come. Yet in all of this, we were never alone, and we are not alone now. God is here. As Paul wrote to Timothy, he urged people to pray—in all ways and all forms- to pray- supplications: asking God for help; intercessions- as we pray to you on behalf of others and thanksgiving- when we praise you and give thanks for our many blessings. Paul states that we are to pray for those in leadership so those who lead quiet and peaceable lives will be able to do so in all godliness and dignity. This is how we should be as we grow in relationship with God and He is the source of all that there is. So why do we need to or should give thanks to God?

Ann Voscamp states, "We give thanks to God not because of how we feel, but because of who He is." So we ask, who is God? According to Paul, God is unique unto himself. There is one God- Creator, Yahweh, I AM, the One, the beloved Father. There is also one mediator between God and humankind—this is Jesus, who became human only to die and rise again for our sakes. And The Holy Spirit which is with us now and comforting us and guiding us in this moment.

Words, words and actions. Thankful words are words which show appreciation to another. Other words which mean the same include being pleased, obliged, beholden to another, and even overwhelmed and indebted to because of some action or statement shared. As Timothy Keller writes, "It is one thing to be grateful. Its another to give thanks. Gratitude is what you feel; thanksgiving is what you do."

So how grateful are you? How are you giving thanks to God?

Let us pray.

God of many blessings; we are grateful for what we receive from you even though we do not know the full extent of your generosity. But you do know the bigger picture of all of life. We give thanks in what we do and say not only today, but each day you grant us to serve on this Earth. Hear our prayers gratefully offered with love and thanks. Amen