

Thanksgiving Service

November 22, 2015

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Philippians 4:12

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (NIV)

The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology did a study in 2003 using 166 undergraduate students. They were divided into two groups. The first group was asked to list five things every week for which they were thankful – to basically count their blessings. They named things like waking up in the morning and good parents and the Rolling Stones. The second group of people was asked to count their hassles – to name some of the things that frustrated them during the week. They listed aggravations such as hard to find parking, and stupid drivers, and a lack of finances.

The results of this study over time showed that the ones who listed their weekly blessings felt better about their lives than the group that listed their weekly frustrations. The grateful group exercised more, woke up more refreshed, and were more willing to help others. So this study concludes we all have our hassles, but if we look around hard enough we can always find something to be thankful for—and when we do, life will be beautiful.

I can't argue against saying it is good to be positive – to look at life and see the glass half full instead of half empty. I certainly am not going to speak against being thankful for our blessings, especially since we are here at church having a special service today to do this very thing. It is indeed good to give thanks. But I question the idea that life will always be beautiful if we do these things. Is this really how we find true contentment? Will ignoring our problems and focusing on our blessings make us satisfied?

Put this theory into practice. You're sitting across from a friend who is ready to give up on life because she wrecked her car and was seriously injured, got fired from her job, and her house recently burned down. Will you sit down with your friend and have her look at her list of things to be thankful for and say: "*At least you have good parents.*" Or if you had a chance to speak to Doug Flutie today (if you didn't hear he lost both of his parents this week within about an hour from separate heart attacks) would you say to him "*you can be thankful you woke up this morning.*" Would it really help in a time of trouble to remind someone they still can enjoy listening to the *Rolling Stones*? At times like that don't you wish there was more? Don't you wish there was some secret remedy to get you through - to make things better? How great it would be to have more to offer and more to turn to than a list of blessings? Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was something that could truly satisfy and make life beautiful all the time?

Dear friends, today we are reminded there is something more for us. Paul refers to it as the "***the secret of being content.***" This is something that applies to "***any and every situation.***" Did you catch that? Listen again to the apostle: "***I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.***" Paul found happiness no matter what his day was like. Paul was completely satisfied in every situation of life. If he was well fed and had plenty he was content. If Paul was hungry and in

want he was content. If he was comfortable and well rested he was content. If he was cold and tired he was content. If he was with friends at home he was content. If he was alone in prison he was content. He ***“learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.”*** If someone is content, then they will more naturally be thankful! Thanksgiving is then more than just an action it is an attitude. That’s why Paul is able to teach us so much about giving thanks. His letters are filled with thanksgiving. His letters are filled with encouragement for us to give thanks. It starts with a heart that is content.

Perhaps this is why we are so terrible at times when it comes to giving thanks. Are we truly content? Are you happy with all the Lord has given to you? Are you completely satisfied with whom you are and everything you have? It all comes from God. When God looks into our hearts does he see hearts that are content, or does He see hearts that always want more? I wonder if God hears more expressions of thanksgiving from our lips or if he hears more complaints. I have a pretty good guess. I am not even talking about when we face real trouble and big problems. Just listen: *“These shoes are so uncomfortable! This bread is kind of dry. These potatoes aren’t as good as last year. There’s no apple pie! It’s too hot. It’s too cold. This WIFI really stinks!”* So many complaints instead of thanks! I’m always reminded of just how sinful we are in the very fact that our God even has to command us and remind us to give thanks. All too often don’t we see a heart that is discontent and unsatisfied?

That’s why I’m glad that Paul’s secret really isn’t a secret at all. You and I know the reason Paul could be content in any and every situation. He says it in the very next verse. ***“I can do everything through (Christ) who strengthens me.”*** Paul had been talking about this secret of being content throughout this letter of joy and thanks that he wrote from prison. When he writes that all the things he thought were once important he now considered rubbish, things to throw in the garbage as long as he says: ***“I may gain Christ and be found in him.”*** Paul was content whether he was in plenty or in want because he now knew his ***“citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** Paul encourages others to be content with the confidence that: ***“God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”***

This is why we too can be content in any and every situation. For we been given the best clothes of all – we have the righteousness of Christ. We have the greatest food to eat for Jesus is the Bread of Life. The greatest act of love of all time has been done for us – as Jesus gave up His life on a cross as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins. Now we have everything we truly need for today, tomorrow and forever because our hope in our Savior who promises ***“I am the resurrection and the life”*** and proved it by rising again on the third day. We have all we need because we have in Christ the Lord of heaven and earth as our Father. So even if you can write down a long list of things to be thankful for – there is only one blessing that is able to make life truly beautiful all of the time. That is Jesus. Jesus is the secret to being content in any and every situation. He is the reason we can wake up each day with sins forgiven, in peace with God, and with a confidence that we will be given all that we need for this day. So I want you to celebrate Thanksgiving this year with this truth in mind: **Contentment in Christ leads to true Thanksgiving!**

I want to close by telling you a story. Have you ever heard of Martin Rinkart? I have often thought that I lived in a time where it is tough to be a pastor and then I read his story. This man was a pastor in Eilenburg Germany during the Thirty Years' War of 1618-1648. He also served during the year of the Great Pestilence in 1637. He served with three other pastors but during that year one fled to a healthier area and Pastor Rinkart officiated at the funerals of the

two other pastors. In fact, in that one year he ended up burying 4480 people in all. That means on average for that one year he conducted over 12 funerals a day! In May of that year, one funeral included his wife. At the end of that year he sat down to write a Hymn. He wanted to give it to his children as something they could hold onto so he wrote the hymn we just sang this morning: **Now Thank We All Our God.** (Read Hymn 610) Contentment in Christ leads to true thanksgiving indeed! Amen.