

Sermon – October 9, 2022

“Rejoice and Give Thanks!” Philippians 4:4-9

Prayer: Gracious God, your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Amen.

There are two words that I consider the most important in the human language. I'm sure you know what those two words are: “thank you”. "Thank you" can be incredibly powerful, especially if the person you're thanking really needs to hear them, or isn't expecting them. To thank someone, if it's honestly done, is to show appreciation. And being appreciated is one of those things that really motivates us. I learned how to say thank you at a very young age. Growing up in a large Filipino family, I was taught to be grateful and to say thank you even for the simplest things in life. Salamat is thank you in my mother tongue. So I learn how to say salamat when I wake up each morning refreshed and rested. I say salamat every time we gather around a meal. I say salamat when someone smiles at me. I say salamat to someone who appreciates what I do or what I say.

When I immigrated to Ottawa in 1994, the first French word that I learned was “merci”. Traveling to different places where language is an issue, I find that people respond to you positively when you say thank you. “Gracias” in Spanish”; “Obrigado” in Portuguese; “gamsahamnida” in Korean; “xie-xie” in Mandarin, “toda” in Hebrew, “meegwetch” in Algonquin. I'm sure there are many other ways of saying thank you in different languages or gestures. At the count of 3, I'd like you to turn to the one seated beside you and say thank you in the language or gesture of your choice. 1-2-3!

In our reading today, the apostle Paul wrote a happy letter to the church in Philippi, a well-known city in Macedonia, which, in our modern times, is probably Northeastern Greece. He reminded the people there to rejoice and give thanks. Rejoice is a happy word. We have modern words for it: cheer up! don't worry-be happy! chill! jump with joy! think positive! But did you know that Paul was actually in prison, awaiting his death, while writing this letter to his Philippian friends? He should be wallowing in sadness, but instead, he was cheerful and hopeful and reminded the church people to “rejoice in the Lord always.” Why do you think Paul would

do that? Because the Philippian church is facing some conflicts about leadership that might endanger the unity of the community. The joy that once energized the Philippian church when Paul first proclaimed the gospel of Christ in their midst is slowly waning.

Paul did not only say rejoice but he asked the people not to worry, to always pray, and to be thankful. These are pretty good words to remember. But the truth is, there are times when it's difficult to rejoice – or not to worry – or to pray or be thankful! We know the saying that “Life is not always a bed of roses.” Sometimes, we are sad and lonely and worried. When a good friend of mine suddenly says, “let's not be friends anymore”, I feel sad. When I am sick in bed, I get worried. When there is a tornado or a hurricane, I feel afraid. It's difficult to rejoice and give thanks in those moments. Nathan Eddy says it beautifully: “Joy always takes root amid adversity; there is no other soil for it to grow in.” Can you think of ways or those times that you are sad or lonely or upset? Share that moment with the one next to you. When I ring this bell, it's time to stop sharing.

When I was a student minister. I met a woman in Arnprior that reminds me of rejoicing even in the midst of unpleasant situations. Her name was Catherine. Catherine was blind and she lived at that time in a retirement home called Arnprior Villa. Despite her limitations, she was always neatly dressed, with her hair carefully made and her makeup tastefully applied. Each morning she would meet the new day with joyful eagerness and anticipation of God's blessings. On my visits, she would ask me to read a passage in the Bible followed by a prayer. I would pray for her and she would pray for me and those around her. There is always a note of thanksgiving in her prayer, even on those days that are miserable for her. My visit entailed moments of storytelling and, in those times, I never heard any complaints from her. She was always on the bright side of things. What Catherine did during her days in the Villa was quite wonderful - when she was able, with her cane, to guide her- she popped in and visited all the other folks in the place. She learned about their birthdays and sent them cards. She checked when they seemed depressed and listened to them talk about it and gave their hand a squeeze and prayed with them if they were willing. She was a light in a dark place - full of joy and peace despite

her own troubles and woes. Catherine's ability to help others, her faith and love and compassion were rooted in her sense of joy. I call these "thank-you-God moments!"

A few days ago, I heard of "thank-you God" moments from some members of our congregation. Someone had been home from grocery shopping having lunch with his daughter for about an hour when he realized he couldn't find his phone. His daughter decided to call his number, hoping to hear it somewhere in the house, but a woman answered it! This lady was walking and found it on the side of the road. The phone was completely in fine shape and was returned to the rightful owner!

A man named David was the brother of someone from this congregation. David, who lives in the US, lost his wallet with all of his credit cards and some cash in it. David gave up looking for his wallet and went to the UK to work there for 3 years. After 3 years, David decided to return to the States for good. One day, David bumped into an old acquaintance in a restaurant. This old friend found David's wallet and returned it to him after 3 long years with all his cards and cash intact.

I'm sure you have some "thank-You God" moments. I invite you to turn again to the one seated next to you and share one of your "thank-you God" moments. When I ring the bell, you need to stop sharing.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving in our homes and families this weekend, let us remember Paul's words to "rejoice in the Lord always!" even in the midst of life's challenges. Paul might say to contemporary believers like us – go ahead – rejoice and live a thankful life. There are many ways we can do this. Support the OWECC Thanksgiving Calendar (show a copy). Bake bread for the woman down the street whose husband has just passed away. Bring food donations for FAMSAC; visit someone in the nursing home or in the hospital; write a get-well-soon card to someone who is recovering from illness; hug your children; pat your dog, sing hymns with gusto and pray fervently at worship. Look around you - find that which is good and thank God for it - find that which is caring and thank God and the person who is doing it - look around - look inside - look outside - and think about that which is noble and true and honourable and

express your praise for it - express it with joy and thanksgiving even in difficult times. Receive God's blessings and offer them to others. Seemingly ordinary acts bear extraordinary gifts of God's love! God is there in our practice of rejoicing, thanksgiving and gracious living.

Live a gracious life so that we can experience the blessings it brings to us and the blessings it brings to others and the world. And don't forget to say those two powerful little words: thank you, salamat, gamsahamnida, xie-xie, merci, gracias, obrigado, toda, meegwetch.

Rejoice and give thanks. Live thanks. Amen.