

THANKSGIVING EVE
NOVEMBER 23, 2022
1 THES. 1:1-10
TWO SIMPLE WORDS

IT TURNS OUT THAT MOM WAS RIGHT. I'M REFERRING TO ALL THOSE TIMES IN YOUR CHILDHOOD WHEN SHE INSTRUCTED YOU TO SAY "THANK YOU". WHENEVER SOMEONE GAVE US A GIFT, OR A CARD WITH SOMETHING SPECIAL INSIDE, MOM WOULDN'T LET US USE IT OR SPEND IT UNTIL THE THANK YOU NOTE WAS WRITTEN AND THE ENVELOPE STAMPED AND DROPPED IN THE CORNER MAILBOX.

SHE ALSO MADE SURE WHEN SOMEONE SAID SOMETHING NICE TO US, PAID US A COMPLIMENT OR DID SOMETHING KIND FOR US THAT WE SAY THANK YOU – THOSE DREADED WORDS "WHAT DO YOU SAY"? WERE HEARD SO OFTEN, AS MOM'S PRIORITY WAS TO RAISE THE 6 OF US KIDS WITH GOOD MANNERS AND THAT OUR FIRST PRIORITY SHOULD ALWAYS BE TO SAY THANK YOU.

WHICH BRINGS ME TO OUR SECOND LESSON FOR TODAY FROM ST. PAUL. IF YOU LOOK AT NOT JUST THIS LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS, BUT MOST OF HIS OTHER LETTERS AS WELL, YOU WILL SEE THAT IT WAS COMMON TO INCLUDE AN EXPRESSION OF THANKSGIVING IN THE OPENING SECTION OF THE LETTER. HE DOES THIS IN ALL OF HIS EPISTLES TO CHURCHES, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE ONE TO THE GALATIANS. IN THAT CASE, IT'S LIKELY THAT HE WAS SO DISTRESSED ABOUT THE PROBLEMS IN THE GALATIAN CHURCH THAT HE COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING FOR WHICH TO GIVE THANKS.

THAT EXCEPTION OF NOT THANKING THE GALATIANS, ALSO SUGGESTS THAT WHEN PAUL DID INCLUDE A THANKSGIVING IN A LETTER, HE DIDN'T DO IT AS A MATTER OF COURTESY OR ROUTINE, BUT ONLY WHEN HE BELIEVED IT WAS WARRANTED.

IN HIS LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS WHICH WE READ TONIGHT, PAUL HAS NOT ONLY INCLUDED A THANKSGIVING FOR THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH MEMBERS AT THE BEGINNING IN VERSES 2-5, BUT HE ALSO THANKS GOD AGAIN FOR THEM HALFWAY THROUGH THE SECOND CHAPTER IN VERSES 13-16, AND AGAIN IN THE THIRD CHAPTER IN VERSES 9-10, WHICH IS A LOT CONSIDERING THAT THERE ARE ONLY FIVE CHAPTERS IN THE WHOLE LETTER.

PAUL HAD A VESTED INTEREST IN THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA, BECAUSE IT WAS SILAS AND PAUL WHO HAD PLANTED THAT CHURCH DURING THEIR SECOND MISSIONARY TRIP. YOU CAN SEE HIS LOVE FOR THEM AS HE COMPARED HIS FEELINGS TO THE COMPASSION PARENTS HAVE FOR THEIR CHILDREN. (2:7,11)

AND HE HAD REASON TO BE PROUD OF THE THESSALONIANS. PAUL AND SILAS HAD BARELY GOTTEN THE CHURCH STARTED BEFORE THEY'D BEEN RUN OUT OF TOWN BY A JEALOUS MOB, YET IN THOSE HOSTILE SURROUNDINGS, THE CHURCH THEY LAUNCHED CONTINUED AND GREW – AND SO PAUL HAD MUCH TO THANK GOD FOR ON THEIR BEHALF. THEIR GROWTH AMID THAT HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT MAY BE WHAT PAUL HAD IN MIND WHEN HE WROTE IN HIS THANKSGIVING “AND YOU BECAME IMITATORS OF US AND OF THE LORD, FOR IN SPITE OF PERSECUTION, YOU RECEIVED THE WORD WITH JOY INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, SO THAT YOU BECAME AN EXAMPLE TO ALL THE BELIEVERS IN MACEDONIA AND IN ACHAIA. (1:6-7)

HERE'S WHAT I WANT YOU TO TAKE NOTE OF – NOTICE WHO PAUL'S EXPRESSIONS OF THANKS ARE ADDRESSED TO – NOT THE THESSALONIANS THEMSELVES, BUT TO GOD ON THEIR BEHALF. HE SAYS “WE ALWAYS GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR ALL OF YOU AND MENTION YOU IN OUR PRAYERS, CONSTANTLY REMEMBERING BEFORE OUR GOD AND FATHER YOUR WORK OF FAITH AND LABOR OF LOVE AND STEADFASTNESS OF HOPE IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.” (1:2-3) OF COURSE, THE THESSALONIANS WOULD HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT AS A THANK YOU TO THEM.

ALSO, NOTICE HOW SPECIFIC PAUL IS IN HIS THANKS – HE’S NOT SAYING HE’S THANKFUL THAT THE THESSALONIANS ARE NICE PEOPLE; HE’S MUCH MORE SPECIFIC ABOUT HIS REASON FOR THANKING GOD FOR THEM – HE’S THANKFUL FOR THEIR WORK OF FAITH, THEIR LABOR OF LOVE, AND THEIR STEADFASTNESS OF HOPE. NOT JUST THEIR FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE, BUT SPECIFICALLY THEIR **WORK** OF FAITH, THEIR **LABOR** OF LOVE, AND THEIR **STEADFASTNESS** OF HOPE – IN OTHER WORDS, THEIR CHRISTLIKENESS IN HOW THEY LIVE THEIR LIVES.

THEIR FAITH IS GROUNDED IN THE SALVATION JESUS OFFERS BUT IT DOESN’T STOP THERE. IT GETS TRANSLATED INTO WHAT THEY DO, HOW THEY ACT TOWARD ONE ANOTHER, THE WAY IN WHICH THEY FACE THE TROUBLES OF LIFE, AND THEIR ATTITUDE ABOUT HOW THINGS WILL COME OUT IN THE END. BEING A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST IS NOT A STATIC BELIEF FOR THE THESSALONIANS, BUT A DYNAMOIC FORCE THAT PERMEATES AND INFLUENCES ALL THEY SAY AND DO.

THAT’S A LOT TO BE THANKFUL FOR IN A GROUP OF PEOPLE.

OF COURSE, WHEN PAUL LETS THEM KNOW HE IS THANKFUL FOR WHAT THEY HAVE DONE AND WHO THEY HAVE BECOME, WHAT HE IS DOING IS ENCOURAGING THEM TO CONTINUE IN THAT WAY AS HE LAVISHES PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING THEIR WAY. HE WANTS THEM TO KEEP ON LIVING THEIR FAITH WHOLEHEARTEDLY. AND PAUL HIMSELF IS ALSO A BETTER PERSON FOR HIS EFFORTS TO THANK THE FAITHFUL, AS HE RECOGNIZES IN TURN, THE WAY GOD HAS BLESSED HIS WORK.

AND SO THIS NIGHT, AS OUR NATION PREPARES TO CELEBRATE THANKSGIVING, WE GATHER TO EXPRESS OUR OWN GRATITUDE FOR ALL THE WAYS WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED THROUGHOUT THIS PAST YEAR. TO GIVE THANKS FOR ALL THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE TOUCHED US IN SOME WAY SINCE LAST YEAR’S CELEBRATION.

YOU’LL NOTICE IN YOUR BULLETIN, A VERY SIMPLE THANK YOU CARD. SEE, IF MOM WAS RIGHT, AND THANK YOU’S ARE A NECESSARY PART OF WHO WE ARE,

THEN THIS IS AN IDEAL TIME, IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FELLOW BELIEVERS, TO GIVE THANKS – TO A PERSON, OR PERSONS, TO SOMEONE WHO HAS MADE AN IMPACT ON YOUR LIFE. I WANT YOU TO TAKE A FEW MINUTES NOW, TO THINK ABOUT THAT PERSON/S AND WRITE THEM A SIMPLE THANK YOU FOR WHO THEY ARE AND HOW THEY HAVE BLESSED YOU.

ST. PAUL SHOWS US THAT WE CAN HELP MAKE THE CIRCLE OF PEOPLE IN OUR LIFE MORE VITAL BY THANKING GOD FOR THE WORK OF FAITH, THE LABOR OF LOVE AND THE STEADFASTNESS OF HOPE OF ONE ANOTHER, AND BY THANKING THEM DIRECTLY AS WELL. BY THANKING OUR FAMILY, FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES THROUGH OUR SIMPLE GESTURE OF GRATITUDE.

THERE REALLY IS A LOT TO BE GRATEFUL FOR, IN JESUS NAME. AMEN.