

December 29, 2024

First Sunday After Christmas

“And Be Thankful”

Colossians 3:12-17

We know nothing of Simeon’s life. We are told *“this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”*

We know very little of the prophetess Anna’s life. We are told her tribe and age, that she’s been widowed for sixty or so years and that she spent all her time in the temple fasting and worshipping.

What we do know is that they both were eagerly waiting for the arrival of Yahweh’s promised Messiah. And into the temple He comes...in a totally non-impressive way, being carried by his mama like any number of other babies who were being brought in for the required rituals and sacrifices after the birth of a child that day.

Yet they rejoice and give thanks over this child. They prophesy about this child’s future. They proclaim to others the truth of Messiah’s arrival.

And then you know what happens? They go home...or continue to hang out in the temple fasting and worshipping...and they get older, and achier, and weaker, and sicker, and eventually their bodies give out and they died. And through it all, even though nothing looks to have changed in the world around them, I bet they continued to rejoice, give thanks, and speak of the little Messiah they held in their arms that day.

In these two we have great examples of right faith in Christ in that they both believed God’s promise before that day; and then even though what entered the temple that day was only a little baby, they believed all the more and were thankful. And as I was reading through St. Paul’s writing to the church today it was the thankfulness that really stood out.

*“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.”*

This is a tall order, but it is obviously what we are called to in Christ—it’s being Christ-like. St. Paul builds up to the greatest virtue, love, and then call for Christ’s peace to rule our hearts. And that seems a natural place to stop—I mean he kind of peaked there with Christ’s peace and love, right? But then he tags on what might have been an important afterthought: *“And be thankful.”*

And that struck me as something that deserves our focus, because we rather easily let this become an afterthought.

We just came out of the frantic period leading up to the celebration of Christmas. (By the way, that wasn’t the Christmas season—the twelve days after is the Christmas season.) But during that period how often did you inwardly or outwardly moan about all the demands placed upon you? How many price tags made you roll your eyes? How often did the stress get to you and sour your mood or worse? How much time did you spend feeling that your life at this time was particularly burdened? Yeah, and I’m not even bringing in all the other really serious troubles you might have going on in life.

A large part of why this happens is that we fail to be thankful, because that for which we are thankful has become an afterthought. When Christmas finally arrived and we celebrated the arrival of the Christchild with thankfulness and rejoicing, where were all those negative emotions and thoughts? They'd been dwarfed by the grace of God in Christ!

*"And be thankful."* It's such a simple phrase, but when we're talking about the salvation Christ brings, it has real power.

I consider Anna. I can't say for sure, but if she's a long-time widow spending all her time in the temple it seems a good bet that she has no family around to care for or take care of her. Folks probably think her life is pretty burdened. But she focuses on the Christ and is filled with the joy of thanksgiving.

Bring this into your life. At your worst frustrated, anxious, depressed and burdened times I bet you're not considering God's grace in Christ. I know I'm not. I'm thinking about me and how tough I've got it. But what happens when, in the midst of all that, the Holy Spirit prompts us to consider God's blessings, the greatest of which is Jesus?

Well, usually it starts with a little bit of shame, doesn't it? We can be such little whiners, can't we? God gives me all these earthly blessings and on top of that forgiveness and salvation at the cost of the Passion of His own Son, but my life is oh so tough because Uncle Norman sent me a Christmas card and I forgot to send him one and now I've got to get one in the mail and it's going to be late! And even the really serious challenges—pain, loss, death—Jesus has assured your life forever in eternal bliss. There's reason for thanksgiving.

And we get past the shame, because we're thinking of Jesus...asking pardon from Jesus for our lack of trust and thanksgiving...receiving forgiveness from Jesus for our lack of trust and thanksgiving and then...giving thanks to Jesus because He is so good to us putting all our pettiness, ungratefulness and sin away from Him as far as the east is from the west.

*"And be thankful."* This seemingly little attitude put into practice in your Christian life changes your outlook, sometimes 180 degrees. I mean, bring Jesus to mind when your attitude is ruined all because you're stuck in a long line at checkout in Walmart—puts things in perspective real fast. But even in the truly bad times, even in the face of death, dwelling of the gifts Christ draws forth hopeful thankfulness for what is to come by His promise. Thanksgiving changes things because of the grace of God to which it is directed.

Continual thankfulness to Christ changes the way you live. The joy of Christmas is really a thing, not so much like the Hallmark Channel presents it, but as a reaction of thankfulness for Jesus Christ entering our humanity—the gift of salvation. That reaction is Christ-aimed, and in that looks a lot like what St. Paul describes—compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, love and peace.

So folks, here is a simple Bible memory assignment for you today—Colossians 3:15b *"And be thankful."* Take it to heart. Maybe write it on a post it note and slap it somewhere you tend to whine a lot. Find a way to put it into practice. Traffic is horrible...and be thankful. The budget is in the red...and be thankful. The prognosis is devastating...and be thankful.

The Christ child arrived and completed the work of grace He was sent to accomplish—He has saved you from your sins, your suffering, your death—by taking it all upon Himself. He has called you to faith and the Holy Spirit enables you to now live your life to God's glory. Knowing this, begin each day, each blessing and each trial by looking to Christ...and be thankful.

Amen.