

I'm finding it really hard to believe this coming Thursday is Thanksgiving. That being said what will your Thanksgiving table look like this year? What is it that must make an appearance on your buffet table in order for it to be a real Thanksgiving meal? [Mom's broccoli salad]

I want to read the following proclamation which was made by Governor William Bradford in 1623, 3 years after the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth:

To all ye Pilgrims, Inasmuch as the great father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, squashes and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as he has protected us from the raids of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience; now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday November ye 29th of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty three, and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Plymouth rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings.

Psalm 92:1-2 NKJV

*1 It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;
2 To declare Your loving-kindness in the morning,
And Your faithfulness every night.*

Wouldn't you agree? Let's pray together a prayer of thanksgiving:

I find it much easier to give thanks when there is a tangible reason for doing so, don't you? When I can see, feel, smell, taste, or hear what it is I may be expressing thanks for, the giving of thanks seems to flow more naturally. [Like when there is broccoli salad].

But what about when there isn't a reason close by? What about when a significant reason to give thanks seems to be a million miles away? What is our natural inclination then?

Well, let's talk history for a few moments. We read the proclamation from Governor Bradford. Let's read the background behind this first Thanksgiving celebration.

On Sept 16, 1620 2 ships set sail from Plymouth England, The Speedwell and the Mayflower. The Speedwell encountered much difficulty as they began their journey springing many leaks in the ship. So when the 2 ships went to Port in Plymouth England, the Speedwell decided to go no further and 42 passengers from the Speedwell joined the 60 passengers and 30 crew members aboard the Mayflower. Of the 102 passengers on board the Mayflower the majority were devout Christians. They were coming to America to shake loose from the bonds of the Church of England so they could worship God as they believed scriptures taught. It was with great excitement and expectations that set sail for a new land.

It wasn't long before the trip became difficult for several reasons, as noted by William Bradford an historian on the Mayflower, who would later become Governor of the colony for 33 years.

Many of the passengers became sea sick as huge waves would crash over the deck of the ship. The nights were cold, damp and dark. Remember there was no indoor plumbing or electricity. And to make matters worse one of the crew, a very large man would constantly curse and abuse those who were sick... saying he was going to throw them overboard and steal all of their possessions... Bradford records, "BUT IT PLEASED GOD BEFORE THEY CAME HALF SEAS OVER, TO SMITE THE YOUNG MAN WITH A GRIEVOUS DISEASE OF WHICH HE DIED IN A DESPERATE MANNER. AND SO HE HIMSELF WAS THE FIRST THROWN OVERBOARD. THUS HIS CURSES LIGHT UPON HIS OWN HEAD, AND IT WAS AN ASTONISHMENT TO ALL HIS FELLOWS FOR THEY NOTED IT TO BE THE JUST HAND OF GOD UPON HIM."

But their problems were far from over yet, they encountered many fierce storms which shook the ship with tremendous force. So fierce that many times they could not even keep the sail out and the force of the wind eventually cracked and bowed the main beams when they had just went over the half way point across the Atlantic. And although the passengers and crew wanted to turn back, Christopher Jones, the ships Master, assured them all the vessel was "strong and firm under water." He ordered the beam to be secured. It was hoisted into place by a great iron screw that, fortunately, the Pilgrims brought out of Holland. AND Upon raising the beam, they "committed themselves to the will of God and resolved to proceed." These 100 people; cold, wet - - on wooden ship in the middle of the ocean -- put their hope, trust and lives into the hands of God.

The battered ship finally came within sight of Cape Cod on November 19, 1620. Two had died at sea and two had given birth. The Pilgrims scanned the shoreline just to the west of them and described it as, "a goodly land wooded to the brink of the sea," William Bradford writes, "AFTER LONG BEATINGS AT SEA THEY FELL WITH THAT LAND WHICH IS CALLED CAPE COD; AND THEY WERE NOT A LITTLE JOYFUL..."

Before going ashore they decided to write a document known as the Mayflower Compact. At the heart of the compact lay an undisputed conviction that God must be at the center of all law and order and the law without a moral base is really no law at all. The day the Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact, according to William Bradford, "they came to anchor in the Bay, which was a good harbor...and they blessed the God of Heaven, who brought them over the fast and furious ocean... and a sea of trouble. And they read the following from the Geneva Bible (the Bible the Pilgrims used) "LET THEM, THEREFORE PRAISE THE LORD, BECAUSE HE IS GOOD AND HIS MERCIES ENDURE FOREVER."

What an account huh? After hearing the pilgrims story it might help us have a renewed recognition of just how **'good it is to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to His name, O Most High; and to declare His loving-kindness in the morning, and His faithfulness every night'**

because our God is worthy of our giving of thanks not only when we reach the safety of shore but when we are in the middle of the tempest as well.

Yet, I have a confession to make: I have been known to be a little less than thankful in the smallest of things such as the absence of Mom's broccoli salad at our Thanksgiving meal. Or the last bowl of Captain Crunch being gone when I go to get it? Or not getting the promotion I thought I deserved. Maybe even at not getting the parking space I was getting ready to pull into.

Do any of these situations resonate with you? Do you know what I mean? When things like this happen, our desire to be thankful is challenged in some weak and insignificant manner.

What about you? Does anybody feel free to share an example of when their thankfulness is challenged, or maybe just totally absent?

I want us to share a very significant verse with each other this morning, and I want it to saturate our very beings as we dwell on this truth.

2 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV

'Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.'

[specifically the first part...]

'Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ!'

Let's say it aloud together a couple of times please.

'Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ!'

'Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ!'

Even when there is no broccoli salad!

You see, our perspective is constantly trying to dwell in the present, while God is consistently trying to draw us into the eternal.

A couple things about this verse:

The word translated 'thanks' here is the same word translated grace 130 other times in the New Testament. It is the very same word we find in **Ephesians 2:8** which says *'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.'*

In reality then the giving of thanks isn't simply a virtue we should try and conjure up when we feel we have been dealt with justly or gotten what we believe we deserved. It is a grace we should live in regardless of our condition.

Matthew Henry writes this concerning this verse:

1. A believer's triumphs are all in Christ. In ourselves we are weak, and have neither joy nor victory; but in Christ we may rejoice and triumph. 2. True believers have constant cause of triumph in Christ, for they are more than conquerors through him who hath loved them, [Rom. 8:37](#). 3. God causes them to triumph in Christ. It is God who has given us matter for triumph, and hearts to triumph. To him therefore be the praise and glory of all.

Let's look at the word 'triumph' used here. This is a word picture of a Roman victory parade which was considered to be both a civil ceremony and religious rite. The conquering commanding soldier would lead a procession which included the senate, magistrates, trumpeters, carts with the spoils of war, white bulls for sacrifice, the arms and insignia of the leaders of the conquered enemy, the enemy leaders themselves with their relatives and other captives, the Roman Emperor with his adult sons and officers, and the army without weapons or armor. This victory parade would begin at the river Tiber and roam through the streets of Rome, and eventually lead into the Coliseum with a huge celebration.

In other words whenever a victory was won they would parade around and celebrate with the vanquished foe in tow and make an open spectacle of the defeated enemy. This not only built their confidence but it also exhibited the weakness of their enemy. It was a powerful and meaningful public celebration!

The only other time this word 'triumph' is translated this way in the New Testament is in **Colossians 2:13-15 NLT**. Listen to this:

13 'You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. 14 He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. 15 In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.'

Another translation says *'He made a public spectacle of them.'*

The strength of this triumph which propels us to be thankful is His victory on the cross, not whether we have broccoli salad on our table or not! We are preparing to celebrate His victory on the cross through Holy Communion this morning and declare by grace our thanks for His body and blood which wrought a tremendous victory over sin in our lives! As a matter of fact we are going to share communion with each other in a manner which will help us reflect along these lines.

[Explain the method of communion]

So when the Apostle Paul affirms this victory in our life by declaring *'thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ!'* He is speaking with great power and authority!

One more time can we?

'Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ!'

Yet the cold hard reality is that oftentimes life situations don't look too 'thank-worthy' or victorious, do they?

What about the Mayflower journey? What about the *'crew member, a very large man who would constantly curse and abuse those who were sick... saying he was going to throw them overboard and steal all of their possessions...'*

What about the position the Apostle Paul found himself in as he wrote this letter to the Corinthian believers? He had brought stiff correction to some in the church and they had risen up and challenged his apostolic authority. Here in chapter 2 verses 3 and 4 he writes of *'sorrow, affliction and anguish of heart, and many tears'* which he had recently experienced.

Look at verse 12-13

12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, 13 I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.'

Things were not hunky-dory for the mighty apostle were they? Not only was there *'sorrow, affliction and anguish of heart, and many tears'* as previously noted, he had no rest in his spirit and he didn't find his trusted associate Titus.

What about you and me? What about _____ [fill in the blank]? What is it that we are facing that causes us great difficulty in mustering up our thanksgiving to Him for His victory?

Well, there's a second part of **2 Corinthians 2:14** which reads *'and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.'*

So the entire verse reads

2 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV

'Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.'

'Diffuses the fragrance' or 'spreads the knowledge' or 'manifest the sweet aroma' or 'spread the scent' or 'spreads everywhere the fragrance.'

Remember, we are created to be bearers of His image and Glory.

One of the ways this is accomplished in our lives isn't just by us willingly and joyfully exclaiming 'Oh blessed be the Lord! Things are just wonderful! I think I will thank Him every second of every day!'

Sometimes the 'fragrance of Christ' is diffused through our brokenness through challenging situations. This includes much more than just no broccoli salad at thanksgiving dinner. Tough times. Hard challenges that tear at us and crush us and provide us the opportunity to release the essence of Christ through our lives.

As we read on through chapter 3 and into chapter 4 listen to the Apostle share some of the 'diffusing' he had recently experienced.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10 NKJV

8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus...

One more time, the entire verse please:

2 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV

'Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.'

The Apostle goes on...

2 Corinthians 4:8-12 NKJV

8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.'

Can we thank Him for the triumph in times such as this?

Listen to this...

13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, 14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

There you have it. *'I believed and therefore I spoke!'* What did they believe? That Jesus Christ was raised up from the dead and we all shall be too if we have placed our faith and trust in Him. This is our hope. This is our basis of thanksgiving for we too believe and therefore we speak...

2 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV

'Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.'

I trust that you have placed your life in God's hand through faith in Jesus Christ, admitting you are a sinner, and accepting His free gift by grace. If not why not right now?

Prayer:

Communion