

**SERMON**  
**Eve of Thanksgiving**

**November 21, 2007**

Deuteronomy 26:1-11  
Psalm 100  
Philippians 4:4-9  
John 6:25-35

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

In his book "Folk Psalms of Faith," Ray Stedman tells of an experience a man named H.A. Ironside had in a crowded restaurant. Just as Ironside was about to begin his meal, a man approached and asked if he could join him. Ironside invited him to have a seat.

Then, as was his custom, Ironside bowed his head in prayer. When he opened his eyes, the other man asked, "Do you have a headache?" Ironside replied, "No, I don't." "Well, is there something wrong with your food?" asked his dinner guest. "No, I was simply thanking God as I always do before I eat," responded Ironside.

"Oh, you're one of those, are you?" the man responded. "Well, I want you to know that I never give thanks. I earn my money by the sweat of my brow and I don't have to give thanks to anybody when I eat. I just start right in!" Ironside said, "Yes, you're just like my dog. That's what he does too!"

As we all know, it is not always easy to be thankful. When the concerns and the worries of the day seem to overwhelm us, the last thing we feel like doing is saying; "Thank-you". I especially know about this, because I am a worrier.

It was once said that worrying is like rocking in a rocking chair; you can do it as much as you want but it's not going to get you anywhere. Well, for me this is a double whammy because I am not only a worrier, but also an avid rocker. It makes the rest of my family dizzy when they try to have a conversation with me. I even have a rocking chair in my office. And as far as worrying goes, no matter how many times someone tells me not to worry, it doesn't do any good.

I think if I were ever relieved of my worrying, I would worry about not having anything to worry about. It seems to be a hereditary thing.

Perhaps some of you here tonight suffer from being a worrier. If so, perhaps these words from Paul in his letter to the Philippians might give us some comfort. As we just heard in our second reading, Paul writes:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let our requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

You see, I have come to realize that the main purpose of Jesus taking on human flesh was not to condemn those of us who worry. Jesus came to save the worrier, along with the prostitutes and the tax collectors, and anyone else who would call on his name. Jesus came for those who are sick, not for those who have no need of a doctor.

Perhaps I will be plagued with this thorn of worrying until the day I die. But I also know that Jesus will be waiting to free me from my worries once and for all when I depart from this earth. And that is what the worriers of the world can be thankful for.

Tonight, we come together to give thanks, even though we might not feel like it – even though we might be beaten down by the worries and anxieties of this world.

Erma Bombeck once wrote the following: “An estimated 1.5 million people are living today after bouts with breast cancer. Every time I forget to feel grateful to be among them, I hear the voice of an eight-year-old named Christina, who had cancer of the nervous system.

When asked what she wanted for her birthday, she thought long and hard, and finally said, “I don’t know. I have two sticker books and a Cabbage Patch Doll. I have everything!” Perhaps the little girl is right. It nourishes our faith when we hear about people giving thanks in the most desperate of situations.

In 1636, amid the darkness of the Thirty Years’ War, a German pastor named Martin Rinkart, is said to have buried five thousand of his parishioners in one year, an average of fifteen per day.

His parish was ravaged by war, death, and economic disaster. In the heart of that darkness, with the cries of fear outside his window, he sat down and wrote this table prayer for his children:

“Now thank we all our God,  
With heart and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things had done,  
In whom His world rejoices.  
Who, from our mother’s arms,  
Hath led us on our way,  
With countless gifts of love,  
And still is ours today.”

Here was someone who knew that thanksgiving comes in response of God’s love for us, not from outward circumstances. This prayer was later turned into a hymn that we will sing at the conclusion of our worship.

This evening, I have decided to have our entire Thanksgiving offering go to support Family Promise of Lake Houston. Congregations provide breakfast and dinner, and safe overnight housing for homeless families. During the day, these families are assisted in finding employment and permanent housing.

This is what God calls the church to be – a source of hope for those who sometimes feel that they have no hope.

This morning I received an e-mail from David Berthold, who is President of Family Promise of Lake Houston. He wrote: “On behalf of the Family Promise of Lake Houston, the core group, the seven committed host congregations, and the committed support congregation, We ask that you pray for Family Promise of Lake Houston and invite you to join us in giving thanks to God.

Our Lord has blessed us this year by giving us a Day Center, a seventh committed church, and the hope that others will soon join this ministry. Mostly we are thankful for the ever presence of God, and that pioneer Spirit that shows through the determination and tireless efforts of all the core group members.

That same Spirit that is reminiscent of our forefathers, who from 13 colonies forged a nation. Let us remember, give thanks, and celebrate our humble beginnings as we look hopefully to the new year.”

You see, even in the hard times, we have so much. We have life, no matter how fragile it may be. We have family and friends, no matter how scattered they are. We have community, no matter how it is

organized. We have each other in this congregation. And we have the presence of God and the promise of Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving is a time when we can choose to recognize these things. A time when we can choose to truly thank God for what he has given us, and to truly trust God for his future care for us.

I would like to close this evening with a list of blessings that circulate this time of year. Maybe some of these are familiar to you.

I am thankful...

For the teenager who is complaining about doing dishes;  
Because that means she is at home and not on the streets.

For the taxes that I pay;  
Because it means that I am employed.

For the mess to clean after a party;  
Because it means that I have been surrounded by friends.

For the clothes that fit a little too snug;  
Because it means that I have enough to eat.

For my shadow that watches me work;  
Because it means I am out in the sunshine.

For a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning, and gutters that need fixing;  
Because it means that I have a home.

For all the complaining I hear or do about the government;  
Because it means that we have freedom of speech.

For the parking spot I find at the far end of the parking lot;  
Because it means that I am capable of walking and that I have been blessed with transportation.

For my huge electric and gas bill;  
Because it means that I have the means to stay cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

For the lady behind me in church who sings off key;  
Because it means that I can hear.

For the pile of laundry and ironing;  
Because it means that I have clothes to wear.

For weariness and aching muscles at the end of the day;  
Because it means that I have been productive.

For the alarm that goes off in the early morning hours;  
Because it means that I am alive.

And finally, I am thankful for Jesus, who, through his suffering and death, and glorious resurrection has provided us the gateway to eternal life. In his name we offer thanks. Amen.

Now may the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting. Amen.