

How to Have a Grateful Heart

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I was very blessed to be raised in a home and with extended family where faith in and love for God was central. We have a family grace that we still say when we are all gathered together. It originated with my dad's grandparents and it is the tradition before a meal for the patriarch or matriarch to lead with all saying, "For these and all our blessings, our Father, we thank Thee. Amen".

One of the family's most beloved patriarchs was my Uncle Ed. Uncle Ed seemed to take everything seriously. He was somewhat quiet, but had an extremely dry and subtle sense of humor. Our families visited frequently and when we sat down to a meal, Uncle Ed would lead grace, saying, "For these..." The meaning of this simple prayer was not lost on Uncle Ed. Such a prayer comes from having a "grateful heart" which is what today's sermon is about.

Before I retired two years ago, I was the director of a preschool in Martinsville called "The Giving Nest". Two faithful women wanted to start a preschool where children could learn to be loving and giving. They felt that no matter how small a child was, they could give to others. First the children had to learn how lucky they were to be loved and cared for and that not all children were as blessed. So at Thanksgiving time we taught them to be grateful for everything in their little lives. We called the lesson, "How to have a grateful heart". We then asked what they could do to help others less fortunate. Their outpouring of care and compassion was infectious. They did not hesitate to want to help.

We are all like children in that we have to learn to have and practice having a grateful heart. This depends on knowing in our hearts that all that we

have and all that we are comes from our Almighty and Loving Father. With this knowledge and with a grateful heart, we should first respond with prayer and Thanksgiving as in Psalm 9, verses 1 & 2 which says:

“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all thy wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in thee. I will sing praise to thy name, O most high.”

When we are grateful, we put our feelings of gratitude into action. The greatest praise we can give to God is to live our lives as faithful servants with love and compassion for others and as a reflection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Some of you may be asking, “How can I have a grateful heart when everything around me seems hopeless? What is there to be grateful for?” To those with a strained or broken relationship, health concerns or financial problems, Jesus reminds us of God’s everlasting love.

In Psalm 100, verse 5 we are assured: “For the Lord is good; His steadfast love endures forever; and his faithfulness to all generations.” What a blessing to be grateful for, one that sustains and fulfills us throughout life’s ups and downs!

Gratitude is the foundation of good stewardship. Today is Thanksgiving AND Stewardship Sunday and I am before you now on behalf of the Stewardship and Finance Committee. When you hear the word “stewardship”, do you cringe a little or immediately think of money? But when we remember that ALL that we have and ALL that we are, are gifts from God and in turn we feel gratitude, then stewardship is the response of a grateful heart to cherish and make good use of all our time, talents (all that we are) and our treasures (all that we have).

We, the children of God at Fanwood Presbyterian Church have many blessings to be grateful for. First and foremost for the steadfast love of God and

of His son, Jesus Christ. Second, for an amazing staff, each of whom are faithful servants who truly feel called here by God; our Pastor, David Jahnke, our Director of Music Ministries, Tom Berdos, our Director of Children's & Youth Ministries, Christie Alston and our Church Administrator, Judith Bowen. Third, we are blessed by this beautiful worship space and by all who worked so hard and who gave generously to make the Capital Campaign a success.

We were blessed by 11 years of sharing space and fellowship with Temple Shalom and the wonderful relationship that resulted. They helped to sustain us financially and grow us spiritually over those years. We look forward to an ongoing relationship of cooperative stewardship. For example, the community Thanksgiving service will be held at Temple Shalom on Monday evening at 7:30 p.m. All are welcome to attend.

We are now blessed by The Garden of Eden congregation and we look forward to a long and lasting relationship with them as well.

I have been working to organize a box of photographs that Judith compiled while cleaning the office cabinets and shelves. Doing this has reminded me how the people of God at FPC have faithfully taken care of each other and served the Lord for generations and it is still very true today.

I found pictures of children with their amazing church school and confirmation teachers; people like George Zhelesnick, Carl Swenson and John Cavicchia working on a home for Habitat for Humanity; choirs and bell ringers; Ginny Kraus using her time and talent to beautify our property; women's and men's groups gathering in times of fellowship and prayer; past ministers and organists; many church dinners, especially our annual Thanksgiving feast; individuals and families participating in the Crop Walk; the Boy Scout food drive and the food bank, many pictures of our youth groups and Summer Quest program. I even found a picture of my youth group in 1968 helping an elderly

woman, Granny Garrett, in Appalachian Tennessee! And now, Fanwood Presbyterian Church is blessed with each and every one of you, your devotion to God, and the sharing of your time, talents and treasures.

We were blessed that at the end of October last year we were in the red \$28,000 and by the end of December, we were \$18,000 in the black. What a blessing it would be to have the same come true for the current year, because currently, we are about the same in the red as last year. So thank you for giving generously in the months ahead.

Pete and I recently watched the movie, *Godspell*, which was his mom's favorite movie and play. Although made in the 1960's, it still has the power to move me today. *Godspell* is based on the book of Matthew and on Jesus' adult life. Jesus, played by a very young, curly-haired Victor Garber, has called and gathered his disciples from many walks of life.

Before the song, "We Plow the Fields and Scatter" they have all come together in a circle, holding hands with Jesus amongst them just as we have come together today. Joyfully dancing, they sing, "We plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land, but it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand; God sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain, the breezes and the sunshine, and soft, refreshing rain. All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above. So thank the Lord, thank the Lord for all His love."

Jesus then told the story of the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:28, 29). Consider the lilies of the field and how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendor was not attired like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you? Reverently and joyfully, the disciples walk toward Jesus, praising and thanking Him by singing, "We thank You, then, Creator, for all things bright and good, the seed-time and

the harvest, our life, our health, our food; Accept these gifts we offer, for all
Your love imparts, and what You most would welcome, our humble, thankful
hearts.”

And so with a grateful heart I once again remember dear Uncle Ed and
pray, “For these and all our blessings, our Father, we thank you. Amen”