

Giving thanks to the Lord. A sermon preached on Thanksgiving Sunday, October 7, 2018 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons: I CHRONICLES 16-8-14
COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

The Chronicler sets this morning's reading in an exciting time of Israel's history.

The Ark of the Covenant is coming home!

Our lesson picks up King David's call for the people to give praise and thanksgiving as the Ark arrives in Jerusalem and is placed in the Tent of Meeting.

The Ark – the repository of the 10 Commandments Moses brought down from Sinai
The staff of Aaron which had budded
And a sampling of the manna – the miraculous provision of food by God that kept the Israelites alive in the days after the Lord through Moses, led the people out of slavery in Egypt toward freedom of the Promised Land.

All contained in a special box or container....
The Ark's return is a big deal – huge deal actually. For this box is a visible reminder of the power and provision of God
Something which God's people – even yet too quickly forget or short change – God's power and provision!

I wonder,
What would it have been like the day the Ark
entered Jerusalem
The Ark -hanging between poles and carried by
Levites
I wonder – what can you hear, see, smell,
How would you feel?
I wonder – would you be caught up in the energy
and excitement that is all around you
What do you think as you see King David leaping
and dancing, dressed only in a loin cloth?
But over the top and exhibitionist?

Do you feel the air vibrating from the sound
of the horns, trumpets, and cymbals, the harps and
lyres?

Are you clapping and shouting, giving praise to
God – arms lifted up

Or are you one who fits the stereotype definition of
a Presbyterian – those who never committed a
pleasure.

The frozen chosen!

Though , I hope last Sunday's celebration of
Saint Giles, the Saint, showed among other things
that Presbyterians are quite adept at laughter and
fun

This morning, the Ark of the Covenant is not
actually before us,

However, God's presence we sincerely hope is here!

If it isn't, then I have to ask, what are any of us playing at?

There is a story told of the then minister of the Washington National Cathedral during the Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Before the Sunday service, the minister received a telephone call in which the following question was asked

"Is the President worshipping there this morning?"

In a moment of brilliance or pique – maybe both – the minister's reply was, "No, the President will not be here today, however God will be present and that, will be incentive enough for a reasonably large attendance!!

In worship – we are always responding to what God has already done and is doing for each of us.

In everyday life, God is always the first responder
All that we are and say and do is a response to what God has already done first.

Jesus in John's Gospel – **You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear much fruit, fruit that will last.**

So on this Thanksgiving Sunday 2018 and in fact all time,

begin, if you have not already done so, or be encouraged to continue to *give thanks to the Lord*

For a significant component of being an urban contemplative – which is what we are addressing on these fall 2018 Sundays – *is to make thanksgiving and gratitude more than a one day or one week-end event and occasion.*

Thanksgiving for God's presence, God's action in our lives,
 God's protection, counsel, love, grace, mercy,
 forgiveness ought always to be just with us.

Aw, but you do not know the troubled I have seen Herb,
 The stress and turmoil, anxiety and pressures under which I am living
 I am going through a real hard time right now
 Thanksgiving is just not on my radar.
 My reply,-- fair enough – I know full well and with empathetic pain and tears,
 Not only is life difficult,--but at times and seasons, life is really, really difficult
 At such times, usually all we can do is lament – cry out – How long O Lord
 And there is nothing faithless in that action by the way.
 Lament is an encouraged practice when times are tough.
 For by it we are reminding ourselves that we know that God is not silent
 And that God is listening through our cries and tears!

And that he has not abandoned us!
 So in really tough times – do not be afraid of
 lament!

By way of encouragement – give thanks! HOW?

We come back to the reading from I
 Chronicles – David’s celebratory response to the
 arrival of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem –
 the presence of God before the people
 What counsel or reminders can be highlighted from
 this morning’s reading
 What do these scripture passages say to you and me
 today?

Well, among other things, I believe *in David’s words we have a great template about how we can cultivate and nurture a life approach to thanking God.*

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name

Make known his deeds among the peoples (vs. 8)

Each of us has much for which to be thankful.
 Thanksgiving ought to be an attitude held and lived
 out by each of us.
 How often though we grumble about what we do
 not have,
 Rather than revel and give thanks for what we do
 have

God is a lavishly giving God – beginning with his
 steadfast love upon each of us through Jesus Christ.

I believe one reason we do not give thanks
 more often or a reason we do not maintain an

attitude of thanksgiving to God is because we think we are entitled to certain things

The truth is: God does not owe us anything!

WHATEVER WE HAVE is a gift God has given us.

I have long been heartened and encouraged by the prayers of one time Chaplain of the US Senate, the late Peter Marshall.

His book of prayers remains as current as when they were crafted in the 1940's.

One particular favorite for me is simply titled "A Grateful Heart"

Pray it with me now,

p. 29 (insert)

**Sing to him, sing praises to him
Tell of all his wonderful works (vs. 9)**

I know not all of us will take advantage of Adries welcoming and opening invitation to join the choir here.

Embarrassment, busyness, belief that crows sound better than you do in song.

Fair enough!

However I still believe an important component in thankfulness is to be engaged emotionally in praising God.

And singing, music and praise ARE emotional are they not?

Each of these things can move us to tears -tears that touch our deepest emotions and hopes.

How often have you found yourself saying in listening to a hymn or a praise chorus – old, modern and in between – not I understand that particular theme or idea in Scripture.

NOW I SEE CLEARLY

That is what I have been wondering about, thinking about, feeling, but the writer has put it better than I could ever do

As to **tell of all his wonderful works**, I believe we all need to improve and do better at this telling-NEVER in a way that makes us just look good or more holy, For the telling must never be about me or us as an end point. God must always be the subject – the end point. John the Baptist's counsel in telling of all of Gods' wonderful works is important to here -**he(Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.**

**Seek the Lord and his strength
Seek his presence continually (vs. 11)**

The verses of that hymn chestnut, 'What a friend we have in Jesus' sticks in my memory banks as an open invitation to seek the Lord and his strength. Especially the hymn's 3rd verse

Are we weak and heavy laden

Cumbered with a load of care.

Precious savior take it to the Lord in prayer

*Do thy friends despise, forsake thee
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In his arms he'll take and shield thee;
Thou wilt find a solace there.*

Or another hymn lights up in my memory banks – a personal favourite – Now thank we all our God.

Originally written as a table grace for his family,
Pastor Martin Rinkhart's hymn speaks so eloquently and movingly about seeking the Lord's presence continually does it not #457 if you care to look at it now.

Verse 2 particularly in sync with David's prayer in I Chronicles 16
For me, Martin Rinkhart's words are powerful affirmations of the need to seek God's presence. What makes them even more meaningful is the context in which this table grace was composed. Rinkhart was no minister who was so heavenly minded that he was of no earthly use. Like many clergy today, Rinkhart was all too familiar with mortality, hard times, grief and loss.

Whenever I think this work is particularly overwhelming,
I think of Pastor Rinkhart in his native town of Eilenberg, Saxony, during the grim days of the Thirty Years War

As a walled town, Eilenberg became a refuge for homeless and hungry people from far and wide
 The war inevitably brought famine and disease.
 When things were at their worst, Pastor Martin –
 the only clergyman in the place – sometimes
 conducted 40-50 funerals A DAY!

It is truly extraordinary that under such conditions
 he not only maintained his strong faith in the Risen
 Lord,

BUT ALSO succeeded in writing a table grace that
 became one of the best known hymns that continues
 to have staying power owing to its dominant note
 of thanksgiving.

Rinkhart is one of my personal heroes of the faith.

**Remember the wonderful works he has done
 His miracles, and the judgments he uttered (vs. 12)**

For the Old Testament, the wonderful works God is
 bound up with the celebration of Passover.

That feast that marked God's action of freeing his
 people from Egyptian slavery and leading them
 through Moses guidance into the Promised Land.
 The Ark of the Covenant is part of that story!

Even today, Passover is remembered and
 celebrated

I have never personally been part of a Seder, but to
 read the rubrics of its celebration,

To hear people talk of it – it is a most moving
 service

I particularly think of all those who remembered and continued to celebrate Passover during the darkness of every persecution experienced by the Jews and particularly during the darkness of the Holocaust.

The opening words of the Seder or Passover Supper are so hopeful and so anchored in God's action for his people.

If the Holy One, Blessed be He, had not brought our ancestors out of Egypt, we, and our children, and our children's children, would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt...the more one talks about the Exodus, the more praiseworthy it is.

It is the foundation of the Exodus and its remembrance through Passover upon which Paul gives his instructions about the celebration of the Lord's Supper – the primary remembrance trigger for Christians of God's wonderful works through Christ

This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this,

As often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Yes, communion is a time of remembrance. But it is also a time of proclamation is it not?

A time to remember all that God in Christ has done for each of us, all that he is doing for us Paul's invitation to remember is open ended is it not?

**For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
(I Cor. 11:26)**

Remember, remember, remember,--not to be nostalgic – about the good old days
Rather, as a way of conditioning the present and the future.

As we look back and see God's abiding presence in our lives then know that God will continue to be with us into the future.

Hope for tomorrow! Based upon assurances and promises fulfilled in the past

So on this Thanksgiving Sunday, and on every day,
The call and the challenge

**1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures for ever.**

**2 O give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures for ever.**

**3 O give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures for ever; [Psalm
136:1-3]**

Amen, Let us pray...