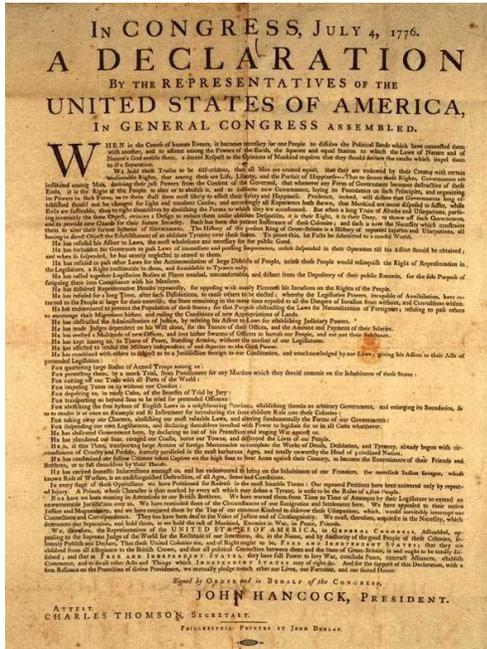


The Gift of Gratitude

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

Colossians 3: 12-17

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **13** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. **14** And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. **15** Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. **16** Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. **17** And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.



I am grateful this holiday weekend, for the [Declaration of Independence](#). It is a backward reading of the section from the letter to Colossians read this morning. Whereas chapter 3 of Colossians begins with a lengthy list of what is dividing the early church and leads toward the section on gratitude, the Declaration begins with what we are grateful for:

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America
When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and

to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

The founders of our country were grateful for the certain “unalienable rights” that they considered a blessing to all people (and yes, it is clear that they had some growing to do in who they considered to be ‘people’. It is an edge that is *still* growing in our young country.) nonetheless, the authors of the declaration started with the gifts of gratitude.

The author of Colossians arrives there in this morning’s lesson. After telling his audience what to avoid, he turns to “clothing ourselves in” these gifts.

*(H)oly and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **13** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. **14** And over all these virtues put on love, which binds*

them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Acting out the gifts of the Spirit with gratitude becomes, for the author of Colossians, a gift in itself. I believe it is a gift that is often overlooked or undervalued, and this summer, I'd like for us to practice it in this "down time" that we've been given by the calendar.

To practice the gift of gratitude is simple in concept: one begins and ends the day by taking an inventory of anything that you are grateful for and give thanks to God for those gifts.

What is not apparent in that concept is that the author of Colossians expected his readers to be thankful not only for gifts in the past and present...but in the future! He expects us to acknowledge gratitude for God's work that has not yet come to fruition.

Last week I was suffering from a pinched nerve in my neck, and I recalled a member of our church saying to me that *"God's healing is on the way."* (*I'll leave it to you to guess who said that to me!*) Those words, and the gratitude I felt for that faithful promise carried me through some difficult procedures that, in fact, did bring me to some relief. My pain levels have dropped from an 8-10 to a 1-2 and, I believe that there is more healing coming, because Jesus is always looking to make us more whole, and I am grateful for that ongoing support...and more, by anticipating gratitude for

myself in the future, it opened me up to anticipating gratitude for other people's healing! When I was able to move beyond the here and now, or the past and present, my compassion grew in ways I didn't anticipate. I began thinking about some of you who have come to me with stories of pain, of suffering, and my prayers of gratitude began to include your healing! My prayers began to include healing for folks I didn't know who were suffering at the border, or in places where Nature devastated their homes. Practicing being thankful has opened up some surprising paths to God.

Like the physical therapy regimen that I have embarked on, gratitude demands exercise. It may hurt a little at first, but in time the muscles develop to respond when we engage in the activity. So too with gratitude. In the beginning we are focused on healing the pain that has been haunting us, but in time, we look forward to a time with no or significantly less pain! We begin to trust through our gratitude, that there is more to come than what we can see, and that trust starts "eeking" out into other aspects of our life, so that when we do experience a pain or a hurt, we still have the reserves of gratitude to move forward...to sojourn toward that promise yet to be fulfilled. Practicing gratitude builds resilience.

So, here's what I'd like us to do:

- I'm going to hand out a gratitude inventory for you to begin while we move into Communion. I'll post a copy of the inventory online at this point in the sermon, [just click here and you can print additional copies of it.](#)

- To fill out the inventory, you begin by directing your attention to God/Spirit/Jesus and say, “Today I am thankful for...” and then begin listing what you are grateful for. Surely there are thousands of things to thank God for: toothpaste, breakfast, a hot shower...the basics...and beyond. And keep going to until you hit 100.

Start your day by writing out this list (start a fresh one each day) and if you have time, end your day with this list. As the founders of our faith and founders of our country attest, the order is less important than *that* you take regular stock in gratitude. It changes how we think, how we feel, how we act around a myriad of issues. Gratitude gives us a sacred perspective that strengthens us through difficult times and sweetens up the easy times.

- When you get to 100, say to God: ***Thank you, God, for all that has been, for all that is, for all I cannot yet see. Amen.***

Got it? Do you understand the assignment? OK, then I will give you a few moments to get started, and then I will start the service of Communion. Feel free to keep writing as I speak. I'll call you up when it is time to receive the gift of God's grace.