

“. . . with Thanksgiving”

Colossians 3:15-17

11/19/17

Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Ready or not, we are moving towards Thanksgiving.

**All around the nation,
families will be sitting down to a meal together.**

Imagine, if you will, a fairly typical family gathering.

**The family has gathered for a meal
and they are seated around the table.**

**There is the middle daughter Alice and her new boyfriend, Spike,
whose tattoos look like a drunken graffiti artist used an
unlimited supply of spray paint on every inch of skin.**

**Shannon is home with her husband,
the son-in-law that wants so badly to be accepted,
but who talks far too loudly
and uses “I” and “me” far too much.**

**Uncle Bob is well on his way to having too much to drink
- again – and waxes eloquent on every subject that comes up.**

**Frank and Darlene will be hotly debating politics;
neither willing to concede the smallest point
for the sake of peace.**

Mom's worried the turkey is too dry; it never is.

**Dad's watching Spike would use his napkin
to wipe the little bit of mashed potatoes off his nose ring.**

**And Tina, the teenage daughter is trying to eat
and text at the same time;
wishing she were in another country.
Any other country!**

**Farther down the table is an empty place;
made more obvious because of the lack of plate and cutlery.
The loss is too fresh for anyone to sit in that seat.**

**Little Charlie, bless his heart,
is listening intently to all that is going on
and wondering who's going to get "time out" over this?**

**There is a pause,
everyone looks to Dad,
who clears his throat, bows his head . . .
and tries to think what he is thankful for.**

**Across town,
Glen is eating alone this year.**

**As his Hungry-Man White Meat Turkey Frozen Dinner
is finishing in the oven,
he is filled regret for not being kinder to his family
and hopes the kids have a good Thanksgiving.**

**He removes his dinner from the oven and peels back the foil,
bows his head and thinks about what he is thankful for.**

**Thousands of miles away,
Master Sgt. Jake huddles against a wall made of sand bags
and tears open his Meals Read to Eat packet
that promises turkey, gravy and potatoes.**

**His first thought is whether he'll have time to finish his meal.
His second thought is for his family back home.**

**He pops a bit of the chopped and compressed turkey into his mouth,
bows his head, and thinks about what he is thankful for.**

**Thanksgiving comes in as many shapes and forms
as there are people trying to celebrate the day.**

**While in Peace Corps,
I spent three Thanksgivings in a country
where no one spoke English and never heard of the day,
where turkeys were extremely rare,
and the best I could hope for
was curried mystery meat.**

**I honestly don't remember if I was thankful.
I hope I was.**

**Before we meet again to worship,
we will have had a Thanksgiving experience.
I hope and pray that it is a good one for all of us.**

And I hope we can all find *something* for which to be thankful.

BEING THANKFUL

The Bible has a lot to say about the "peace of Christ."

**It is traditional in this Church,
to turn to our neighbor and offer the “peace of Christ.”**

**In 1980,
I went to see the first “Star Wars” movie.**

**I was surprised to see so many Presbyterians there.
How did I know they were Presbyterians, you ask?**

**When Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi said:
“May the force be with you,”
Half the audience responded,
“And also with you.”**

**So, let’s take a look at this “peace”
and see why it is almost inseparable from being thankful.**

**One would find it hard to find “peace”
around the Thanksgiving table I used as an illustration.
And that may describe your table, as well.**

**But with all their faults and frailties,
this is a *family* – people held together by an invisible bond.
Sometimes that bond is love; sometimes it’s just duty.**

**For whatever reason,
they have *chosen* to gather on this day for a common meal.**

**And so, it is in the Church,
we may not all agree on all things –
I know *my* political views certainly clash with the views of
others –
however, I am at peace with them.**

When Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians,

the church was under attack both from inside and outside.

**False teachings had found a foothold in the Church
in the form of denying the deity of Jesus –
they were teaching that Jesus was not God.**

**This small church, filled with new Christians,
was trying very hard to carve out a place in society –
and the going was tough with lots of resistance.**

**For Paul, the nature of Jesus as Creator and Redeemer
was nonnegotiable.**

**Paul wanted the church to focus on the glory of God
rather than the present circumstances surrounding them.**

**And that becomes our first real clue
As to how to attain the “peace of Christ.”**

**If we dwell on the negative circumstances surrounding us
we cannot focus on the “goodness” of God’s creation.**

**My theology professor said he could always tell
Whenever he was focusing too much on the world.**

**When he began finding change dropped on the sidewalks of campus
As he moved from building to building,
He knew he was looking “down” instead of “up.”**

We will never find the “peace of Christ” while looking “down.”

**Too often we seek practical instruction and helps for living,
We expect peace without confrontation,
We get so caught up in our day-to-day reality
That we forget to look “up.”**

**Looking “down” leads only to anxiety, anger and misery.
You won’t find “peace” by looking “down.”**

**By looking “up;”
Focusing on Jesus as the center of our universe,
The author and finisher of our faith,
We are on the path towards peace.**

**Am I saying that focusing on Jesus
Will change a horrible medical report? No.
But it will help us to see *beyond* that report.**

**Will focusing on Jesus bring a prodigal child home? No.
But it will help us focus on the future possibility of that.**

There is a progression here, I think.

**It is difficult – not impossible –
to move from being thankful to being peaceful.
Many saints have achieved that.**

**It is hard to focus on being thankful
When we are beset by inner conflict and confusion;
It’s hard to focus on *anything* other than the situation.**

**It is more common for the rest of us
To move from being at peace to being thankful.**

**When we strive for – and attain inner peace –
Then we can be truly and completely thankful.**

**Paul said:
And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,
teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing**

**psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in
your hearts to God.**

**If we look beyond the immediate circumstances,
We will begin to see there *is* hope.**

**And it is that hope that takes us by the hand
And leads us into a future of God's making –
A future that is filled with peace.**

**Let me end this sermon with a short list of what gives me peace
And the things I am thankful for.**

**My soul has found peace in Jesus Christ.
He has rescued me from the fate I deserve.**

**Because of that peace,
I am thankful for a great wife,
A really good Church
And the opportunity to serve God in this church.**

**May you Thanksgiving be filled with the peace of Christ –
And may your hearts soar with Thanksgiving.**