

The stage is set. With the diminishing of the number of daylight hours, the leaves are changing colour. Forested areas, and we are blessed with the reality of being surrounded by forested areas, the bush has become a riot of colour. Red and orange, russet and brown, yellow and still a touch of greenery to set it all off. And on a sunny afternoon, such as we were afforded yesterday, the whole affect achieved rises to a level beyond just the presence of colour. As I said, the stage has been set. It is not just Autumn. It is the season for the giving of thanks, to God our Father, the Father of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who pours His Spirit into our midst.

To say the stage is set for Thanksgiving is to assume you know to whom you are giving thanks. For us as Christians that means this is a time for pinpointing our attention on the Lord who is with us, and with us all the time, the Lord who saves us from our our own shortcomings and sins, the Lord who is One and yet reveals Himself still in three different ways. There is no reason to give thanks unless with some confidence, the confidence of faith, you can talk about God and address Him. We are not thanking ourselves or our neighbours or the government. Even less, we are not thanking luck for our well being.

I can barely put into words how blessed I feel, this year, this month, this week, this day, that I here, alive and to some degree able to give thanks. My current wrestling with health issues has only served to remind me how important to me is my faith in Jesus Christ. The love of my wife and family and the opportunity to continue to give love to those who have helped to bear me along the path we have travelled the balance of this year. I reported to a friend during the week, that I have been tatoood, that is what the medical people

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call it, marked permanently in preparation for my radiation treatment. I am now only awaiting the phone call that tell me to come to Kingston to begin my course on a specific date. My friend commented, "You just want us to keep praying for you." I must admit, it has been an unexpected blessing, to find myself at the focus of so much concern and love. It is a blessing to be prayed for by you and so many others, across the province, throughout the nation, and around the world.

So I find myself this Thanksgiving, relishing the words I have found and found anew in 1st Thessalonians 5:16-18. They are comforting words. They are challenging words. They are faith building words. And most importantly, they are God's words to us through the apostle who wrote them, to put our celebrations in perspective. “ Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

It is really easy to see the part about their being challenging words. “Be joyful always.” There are times when joy is not my foremost emotion or my firsts reaction to the cirmcumstances in which I find myself. Back in February when my family physician referred me to a urologist I knew we were at a potentially sobering point in the journey of life. The possibility of my father's illness and death were suddenly mine. With the definite diagnosis of cancer in March and the scheduling of tests to prepare the way for surgery. Possibilities were suddenly potential reality. As one who has wrestled life long with depression, I can tell you what surprised me, was that the invasion of grey was rather quickly set aside. There was too much to be thankful for and therefore too many reasons to feel joyful, and I chose to be joy filled rather than to descend and dwell in the grey moods that threatened.

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Someone said, “You have to fight this with everything you have.” I did not feel brave. I felt vulnerable. And even in that vulnerable state, there was so much laughter. So many things to see as, for lack of a better word, victorious possibilities. Should treatment go well, I continue in ministry! I continue to enjoy my loved ones, I continue to share with my friends, among whom I number all of you. And particularly before the surgery of May 29th, should things go badly...all those things I have spent my life talking about, the presence of the Lord, heaven, salvation, angels, the throne of grace...I would get to see with my own eyes. Eternal life is just that, eternal life, the gift of a loving and redeeming God.

I have to admit I have shed a lot of tears since last February. But never feeling sorry for myself. Rather I have found a level of joy that is almost strange for me. A sense of joy in which somewhat like the early days of faith when I was about 17 or 18, I became aware that living meant

moving on, one step at a time as the Lord our God marks our steps and leads us, in the direction we should go. You know I have a love of the KJV. Here is what it says..."Rejoice evermore." Rejoice forever. For all time. I actually think I am getting there. To be sure there have been days tinged with grey. The day I was informed I needed radiation treatment was one of them. But even then there was the word "cure" used by my doctors. When you are talking about cancer in any form, there is no better word or possibility than cure. I rejoice at the possibilities in the world and in the next. I do. "Be joyful always."

"Pray continually." You know a diagnosis of cancer will do wonders for your prayer life! No joke. Even the most faithful among us tend to live our daily lives under the illusion of control. We pay our bills because we want the light and the heat to remain in our

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homes. We manage our affairs and the older we get the more deliberate we become about management. At least that is my experience. The balance of my life I was sloppy about exercise. I would be fervent a while, even was diligent about running 3-4 miles a day, for about 3 years. Then I lapsed into an easier way. I have lost weight, gained weight, lost weight as the result of a carelessness about what I ate...maybe more accurately...about the quantities I ate. The last 10 years salad has become a daily routine. I have not suffered the swings in weight that have been my pattern for the balance of my life. Exercise, walking in particular, has become a daily routine. Prayer has become a far greater concern in terms of discipline and investment of time. I have always been in favour of prayer. But I never invested the time the way I seem to now invest the time. In this last year, being the subject of prayer, of so many others, here, abroad and from people I really do not know personally, has caused me to spend more time than ever before in prayer for others. The apostle Paul urges us to find the fullness of the thanksgiving experience, small t, not capital T by pursuing a joyful attitude, and by building our prayer discipline.

Praying continually, means literally sifting your life experience through a prayerful attitude. Continually turning to seek the face of God, what a friend we have in Jesus, leaning on the everlasting arms of God that we experience in the presence of His Holy Spirit.

“Give thanks in all circumstances.” The KJV puts it this way...
“In everything give thanks.” Don't ever think that means being thankful that bad things have happened to you, as in thank you God for the pain of this heart attack, or the pain of this recovery of surgery, or the way this next treatment is going to literally control 6

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to 7 weeks of my life. That is not what the dear apostle Paul is getting at. He is not facile. He is not dealing with the surface details. And he is not being silly. What Paul is getting at, is this: when our eyes are open to the possibility of being blessed...and I am slowly learning this...illness and a sense of loss of control, or the ability to see that the idea that we are in control is always an illusion, makes it easier to see blessings for what they are...gifts of God.

This afternoon Matthew and Rebekah will arrive at the farmhouse for Thanksgiving dinner. Barbara's brother Ken and my sister-in-law Ardith and their children, Paul and Aerlie will come to share the feast with us. It is easy to be dismissive and say that's what family does. I say not so fast...not so long ago we were fortunate to see this extended family a couple of times a year, and often there were people who were missing from the circle. I am counting blessings here. This year the circumstances are such we will share in Thanksgiving. This year, standing here and being with you as my church family is a blessing of huge proportions. I give thanks to God for this circumstance. This possibility. I feel as though my eyes have been opened, to see details of the grace of God I would otherwise have carelessly passed by without noticing. That is the meaning of “giving thanks in all circumstances.”

“For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” There is the heart of the matter. Are we Christians? Yes we are. And part of what that means is that we need to view everything that is happening to us and around us, is not the result of random chance nor bad luck. The details of daily life come on the wings of the Spirit of God, or at very least come with the Spirit of God standing beside us, some times cradling us in His arms. We are not floating in an ocean of possibilities like the bottle that contains a message at the whim of

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wind and wave. God is with us. We are not alone. The details of life have their place in the will of God for us. And that being the case, this being

God's will for us in Christ Jesus, nothing can go wrong.

This is a moment for each of us to trust God more than we have done in the past. And at the heart of that reality....trusting God....I will make you a promise, the apostle Paul made to the believers in Thessaloica...you will discover the blessing hand of God upon you. And you will find yourself smiling. How natural it is that faith, even as small as a grain of mustard seed, would respond, Thank you Lord. Thank you.

Let us pray;

Lord you have painted the forest with the magical colours of this season. Blue sky and a little sunshine changes the ways we perceive what we see. For food and family and homelife. We give you our thanks. For the safety we have in your loving embrace, we thank you. Be with us even we cannot see you are with us. In Jesus precious name we pray.
Amen