

June 17, 2018    To The Church: Thank You    2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

You may feel by the time that this message ends that you have heard it all before. In fact it is not so much a sermon, as the expression, of what is in my heart at a time and in a season such as this is. Paul, the apostle to the unbelieving Gentile world, to us and our kind gave thanks for the people who made up the church in Thessalonica. I too give thanks. For you. For us. For God's work as we have been privileged to share in it, in the name of Jesus Christ, and in the power and giftedness of the Holy Spirit.

We are living in a time in which too many would rather say anything about the church with the exception of giving thanks for it. I cannot be anything other than grateful for the journey I am still enjoying within her ranks (the church) and especially with you. "The party" marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my being able to share life in marriage to Barbara was a "love in". The hippie movement of the late 60's and the 70's would be proud of us. I have so much to be thankful for when it comes to the church of Jesus Christ, and the journey I have shared in her branch known to us as The Presbyterian Church In Canada.

In the time line of my life, I am thankful to the church for Millie Brown. To quote Clint Eastwood in "The Outlaw Josie Wales" she was raised in a time of blood and dying. World War II to be specific. She married a man who was in the Air Force and was killed early in the War. She was left

alone to raise their infant child, my best friend in youthful days, Web Brown, and she got a second chance at happiness in marrying Bill Brown, a plumber, in Port Arthur. As some of you know Mrs. Brown was the one who led me to faith. Faith in God, faith in Jesus, faith in the Holy Spirit.

That is not just a credal statement. It is not that I just did not believe, I ridiculed young people and older people who did believe. It was a significant change in my life to acknowledge there was Someone up there who made me and perhaps cared for me. Somehow I absorbed that over tea with Mrs. Brown, and playing chess with her very ill son who was 2 years younger than I. Discovering under her guidance that Jesus was not only an historical figure but that he saved me from my sin and bitterness was like living through an ELE. Living through an Extinction Level Event. Everything changed. Everything.

Through Mrs. Brown I discovered the saving nature of the Gospel. I discovered the present reality of the Holy Spirit of God...God with me, and in me, my Comforter, my Guide. I discovered I had gifts I did know existed. And I discovered the church, specifically Oliver Road Presbyterian Church in Port Arthur as a congregation of The Presbyterian Church In Canada. It was a small church. Like us, it struggled to survive. And it taught me a lesson I shall never forget. Shortly after I graduated from Knox College and began my work in Kapuskasing it died.

But these are some of the facts you have to understand when I give thanks for the church. They welcomed me. They took me in. They encouraged me. They urged me on in terms of developing into a minister of the gospel. They were like proud parents on the night I was ordained. The Young People's Group of that church is an experience we still talk about, and there are individuals from it that we are still in contact with. It was through Mrs. Brown that I met them, and discovered for the first time what it was like to actually be a part of a Christian fellowship, dedicated to worship and service in Jesus name.

And of course when you connect the dots, it was through Mrs. Brown therefore, that I met Barbara. At Young People's. She was beautiful and magnetic and terrifying all at once. It took me a year to ask her out. The Brown family even played a part in that. Web was having a birthday. By this time we are all in High School. I am about to start Grade XIII. Naturally Web invited me to the party...a dance in the basement of the Brown home. And terror of terrors, he said I had to bring a girl!

One of the first things Clerks of Session have learned throughout my ministry is that if it is in Barbara's book, with the change of technology, in Barbara's phone...I will be there. She has been my Personal Assistant, ever since that birthday party. My confidant, my counsellor, the one with whom I can talk about anything and receive unqualified

support. I thank God for the Church because the Church (and I am not talking about the corporate institution, although even it has to be included...it has a place in my life and in my growth as a Christian)...I thank God for the Church because everything I treasure in life has come to me as a result of her existence and her continuing ministry.

Barbara has been there beside me and with me in every watershed moment. Seeking recognition as a candidate for ministry, moving away from Thunder Bay (Port Arthur) never to really return...to visit yes...but not to return. Attending Knox College. Graduating, being ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Serving in Kapuskasing and Cochrane, coping with the challenges of a building Programme, leaving to start over in New Liskeard. Coping with the structural damage to that church building while building up the congregation. Starting and completing my doctorate at Fuller. Starting the church in Pickering, Amberlea. Having and raising Matthew and Rebekah. Coping with retirement. Discovering Ministry was not over for me. Cancer. Radiation. The signs of definite aging...coping with limitations that were new. When I say I love her, what I mean is God and the Church gave me the perfect partner. She has enabled me to do so much more than I ever dreamed. So I give thanks for the Church.

Then there are all the people I have been privileged to work with. You. Each one of you and all of you. To paraphrase Paul, "I ought always to give God thanks for you.

Brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you..." I am so privileged to serve in your midst. We have made memories together. And I know it is not over, but it is necessary in an age when people do not go out of their way to give thanks for the church, the Holy Spirit of God has prompted me in Jesus name, to express my thankfulness for being able to say I am the minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Stirling, Ontario. I thank God for you, for your care of me and of Barbara. At times your love displayed in kindness simply overwhelms me. Thank you Jesus, for this church!

Maybe you have to become a Senior Citizen to have this insight. Being a disciple of Jesus is all about caring for and being cared for by people. There are a number of people here and in St. Columba, in Belleville who remind me every time they see me...and they were among the St. Columba people who came to the party last Saturday...they remind me that they daily pray for me and for Barbara and the people we serve. I get goose bumps every time they do that. Thank you Jesus for the church.

I have walked with giants in my time. When I was newly ordained, the Rev. Dr. Louis Fowler was the Clerk of the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church In Canada. He said, "You cannot be a Presbyterian minister without knowing the Holy Spirit is present and real and gifting you to do what

you have to do.” He held at least 2 doctorates and was a qualified architect. Old School. A giant.

I had the privilege of studying under the late Professor Allan Farris at Knox College. For my money the greatest preacher I have ever heard. His son Stephen, newly retired is a giant too. And although I am biased my daughter is looking more and more like a giant to me too. I thank God for the church. He fosters people who change us and make us grow. I studied under Dr. Pete Wagner, and John Wimber, and I interviewed Donald McGavran at Fuller in Pasadena California. They gave me the confidence to try starting a church from zero...Amberlea in Pickering. Giants. Sunday messages do not usually end this way...I had better quit. I just want you to remember...you heard your minister say out loud...I thank God for the church of Jesus Christ. And that includes you.

Let us Pray;

Sometimes the church can really screw things up. As an institution and organization she makes mistakes. And yet for all that through the church you lead us to faith, to rediscover our faith in Jesus, and you meet out to us what we need to grow in faith. To take risks in your marvelous saving name. Continue to lead us. Continue to bless us. Without your blessing we are nothing and we lose our way. Find us when we are lost. Build us up in weakness. Thank you Jesus for the church and its serving you. Amen