



Servants of Christ
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The Peace of Choosing Gratitude

Psalm 116 1-6 I love God because he listened to me,

listened as I begged for mercy.

He listened so intently

as I laid out my case before him.

Death stared me in the face,

hell was hard on my heels.

Up against it, I didn't know which way to turn;

then I called out to God for help:

"Please, God!" I cried out.

"Save my life!"

God is gracious—it is he who makes things right,

our most compassionate God.

God takes the side of the helpless;

when I was at the end of my rope, he saved me.

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

I have a confession to make. Every time I get in the car and it cranks (it has 97,000 miles on it but is paid for...) I am thankful. A couple of years ago I went to the United Methodist Camp in Longview, TX. As I pulled my car into the swamp of my accommodations in a mold-infested double-wide, my car decided its original battery had given up the ghost. I don't know if you've ever been to Longview or Palestine (Pa-les-TEEN, the locals will correct you) but the cellphone coverage is not as wide-spread as in Houston. It was a literal, honest to goodness, praise Jesus miracle that I found a two foot spot that connected to AAA for an hour. Hundreds of dollars later, good ole Belvedere (yes, I name my cars) was purring like a kitten. But I was thankful.

Back a long time ago, like 6 weeks ago, we could get on a plane and fly practically anywhere in relative ease (unless you're on Spirit or JetBlue, just kidding. Not really). Or we could have gotten in the car and travelled north on 35 and gone to Dallas. We can get around the globe fairly easily.

But for pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem in the time of the Psalms, it was not so easy. No cars, no trains, no planes. Just you, your family, and a donkey or two travelling in the hot sun without shade. Robbers knew the travel routes and were all too happy to relieve you of extra money or baggage. And don't forget the lions, bears, crocodiles, and cheetahs who were looking for their next lunch. So, when you arrived, you gave a thanksgiving offering to God.

For them, an offering might be unleavened cakes or partaking of the meat that had been sacrificed. But throughout the Bible, thanksgiving is directly tied to peace of mind and body and spirit. We all have needs and we all have blessings; on which do we focus? What are the results of focusing on one over another? In Ephesians and Philippians, Paul says to give thanks in all things. It is a learning curve, I know. But every world religion I know lifts thanksgiving to the highest virtue. In Buddhism, there is no greater think than to give thanks because it reminds of our connection to the whole world. In Hinduism, gratitude is a key attribute of the divine.

There is a story about two disciples sitting with their teacher under a large, ancient oak tree. One disciple asks, "When will I be able to sense God's presence in my life?" The teacher whispered, "It may take many years." This disciple bowed his head in disappointment. The other disciple, anxious to know the same thing for him, asked, "When will I be able to sense

God's presence in my life?" The teacher leaned over and whispered, "Maybe as long as God has preserved this mighty oak tree." The disciple got up and danced because now he knew he would, at last, know the presence and peace of God. It was going to happen, but it might not be instantaneous.

We do not have to be rich to have thanksgiving. No one and nothing can take gratitude from us. It is free and available. May we be thankful with where God's grace has brought us to this day. May we be grateful for this day and the air to breathe. May we be thankful that God brought the pilgrims to Jerusalem in the Psalms, that God brought Paul through his journey, and that God will deliver us on this earth and, ultimately, into his presence. May we dance like the disciple who was assured that God would forever be with him. It might not seem like it now, but it will be. So be it.

Prayer:

Lord of all grace, comfort me with your compassion in this difficult time. I am your child, I belong to you and you have compassion on all that you have made. Fill my heart with the assurance that you are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love towards me. In your mercy, may I find peace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

