

FROM THE PASTOR'S HEART

Worship in heaven and earth is a matter of giving thanksgiving to God.
Revelations 7:12 depicts heavenly worship thusly,
“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

We all have so much to be thankful for, praise God! The annual Thanksgiving holiday again gives us the chance to get in touch with the many blessings of our lives. Most of us are fortunate to list our family at the top of our blessing list. Linda land I also include you, APUMC, as part of the family blessing God has bestowed upon us. As itinerants, we have learned the importance of the spiritual family of the congregations we have served. Biology is not the only way God creates family among us. Our church is a family blessing that we extend to a world that suffers and longs for the very things we take for granted in the church. “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1) Think of this when you gather around your family table this Thanksgiving. Think of it when you gather around the Lord’s Table at church.

Do you want to be happy? Give thanks. Develop a grateful spirit. America is not a happy place, despite all our blessings. We are not a thankful people. The US ranks 11th in a survey of “life satisfaction” – behind Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and the other usual suspects. That’s not too bad, but we were among only five who felt their satisfaction with life was not increasing. (Hungary, Portugal, Canada, Japan) Plus, the research on this was conducted before the current recession. If we want to turn this around, we can each start practicing saying two words more often, “Thank you.” Start with the Creator. Move on to lesser beings. Don’t stop till you get to mosquitoes.

Ellen Johanson, our Conference Media Librarian tells of her experience in keeping a “Blessings Journal.” You might want to give it a try.

Giving Thanks in a Culture of Abundance

What does it mean to be grateful in a culture saturated with an over-abundance of everything? Whether it's food, technology, clothes, information, cars, credit cards, cash machines--the options available to us each day are staggering--yet I was surprised to hear my pastor, during a recent conversation at church on stewardship, quote a study saying that most Americans feel they would be happy if they just had 20% more. More money? More time? More stuff? This exemplifies how difficult it is for us to be thankful because we already have so much. We take everything for granted because it is plentiful and available. We feel entitled to and proud of what we have rather than humbled and blessed by what we receive.

A number of years ago I kept a gratitude journal that helped me through a tremendously difficult period in life. Each day I wrote down 5 things for which I was grateful even when it seemed that I was surrounded by bleak and depressing circumstances. When I look back at that period, I see a consistent pattern of gratefulness for the smallest and seemingly most insignificant things, yet each of those things was immensely more powerful than money or status or stuff--these were the real blessings of life which I had taken for granted.

They included color, laughter, children's voices, smiles, sunshine, songs, robins, my cat purring on my lap, crisp apples, hot cups of tea, sunsets, blue sky, clouds, rain, phases of the moon, flowers, home-cooked meals, hot baths...the list goes on and on...and they are each so ordinary. I didn't make, or earn, or buy them. They were just there to experience and appreciate. I realized by accepting all that is present in my life and viewing it as a gift from a loving God, I could better handle all the complexities of life's most difficult circumstances.

I cultivated an attitude of thankfulness amidst hardship and abundance; and in that process became a stronger, more mature follower of Jesus Christ..

See you at our next family gathering, in Church, APUMC!

Pastor Carl