

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
by the Rev. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

“Mark Twain’s Favorite Word”

1Thessalonians 5:12-18

October 8, 2023

When Mark Twain was at the top of his writing career, he was paid one dollar per word for every word that he wrote. One day a few students sent him a letter with a dollar enclosed in the letter asking him to send them his favorite word. Mark Twain wrote back a simple one-word response: “Thanks” Is thanks your favorite word?

One of the keys to Twain’s success was that “thanks” was not only his favorite word, but the word he used often. He was gracious and grateful for the life he had, he once said of procrastination, “Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can put off until the day after tomorrow.” And he wrote of bad habits: “It’s easy to quit smoking, I’ve done it dozens of times.” And when he wrote about staying in good physical health, “When I feel the urge to exercise, I sit down until the urge passes.” He was able to laugh at life

and himself because “thanks” was his favorite word. It is a word and a way of life that can change your perspective if you let it. Now, that was what St. Paul was saying. He said, “Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who labor among you and preside over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them most highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, to admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient toward all. See that no one pays back evil for evil to anyone, but always pursues what is good for one another and for all. Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” In

everything give thanks, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. I have three simple thoughts about thanksgiving.

I

We have it so good. ¹² Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴

St. Paul was reminding the believers to show appreciation to the people around you, to live in a manner that acknowledges not only your faith in your actions toward others, but that fact that we have it so good. “Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, ¹⁴ to acknowledge those who labor among you and preside over you in the

Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them most highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, to admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with all. See that no one pays back evil for evil to anyone, but always pursues what is good for one another and for all. Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

I am Thankful for.....

....the taxes I pay because it means I'm employed.

....the clothes that fit a little too snug because it means I have enough to eat.

....my shadow who watches me work because it means I am out in the sunshine.

....a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning and gutters that need fixing because it means I have a home.

....the spot I find at the far end of the parking lot because it means I am capable of walking.

....my huge heating bill because it means I am warm.

....all the complaints I hear about our government because it means we have freedom of speech.

....the lady behind me in church who sings off key because it means that I can hear.

....the piles of laundry and ironing because it means my loved ones are nearby.

....the alarm that goes off in the early morning hours because it means that I'm alive.

....the weariness and aching muscles at the end of the day because it means I have been productive.

Isn't that so true. "Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

II

We have it so good, and secondly, **we should enjoy it much more.** *"Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

Someone said, "We worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship." This is very true for many people. With all that we have been given we ought to enjoy it much more. I have often thought that rather than having one day a year we should give thanks we should have one day a year called "Complaining Day" and the other 364 days of the year days for thanksgiving. It is just more logical. We waste so many days complaining about life rather than enjoying it.

Like the minister who was complained about after a sermon by a man with red hair...

Don't worry about him, that is just Jim, he just repeats what everyone else is saying.

Obviously, they forgot the first part of 1 Thessalonians where it said, "acknowledge-show appreciation - to those who labor among you and preside over you in the Lord (ministers) and admonish you, and to esteem them most highly in love because of their work.

III

Not only do we have it so good, and need to enjoy it much more, but we **express it so little.** We express our thanks so little. St Paul was reminding us to *"Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

Some years ago, the cartoon pictured Charlie Brown bringing out Snoopy's dinner on

Thanksgiving Day. But it was just his usual dog food in a bowl.

Snoopy took one look at the dog food and said, "This isn't fair. The rest of the world today is eating turkey with all the trimmings and all I get is dog food. Because I'm a dog," he said, "all I get is dog food." He stood there and stared at his dog food for a moment and said, "I guess it could be worse. I could be a turkey."

We could be a turkey at Thanksgiving! We could have been born and raised in some third world country where the people have little or nothing!

Instead of thinking about how little we have, we need to count up what we do have and give thanks!

In Los Angeles a parking citation with a five-dollar bill attached arrived at the traffic-fine bureau. An accompanying note said: "I found this ticket on the sidewalk. Not knowing if the car owner has ever seen it, I would like to make the remittance for him—in gratitude for the occasions when I have parked over the allotted time and not received a ticket."

The young man was feeling very proud of himself. As a brand-new college graduate, he had taken the C.P.A. Exams and passed with flying colors. Now he was a full-fledged Certified Public Accountant.

His father had been an immigrant to the U.S., and now owned his own little business. Filled with self-importance, the young man began to criticize his father's way of keeping books. He said, "Dad, you don't even know how much profit you've made. Over here in this drawer are your accounts receivable. Over there are your receipts and you keep all your money in the cash register. You don't have any idea how much money you've made."

The father answered, "Son, when I came to this country the only thing I owned was a pair of pants. Now, your brother is a doctor, your sister is an art teacher, and you are a C.P.A. Your mother and I own our home. We have a car and we own this little business. Now add that up, subtract the pants and all the rest is profit."

Add it up! That's exactly what we need to do at Thanksgiving. Add it all up. We came into this world with nothing but the eternal soul that God gave us. Everything else is profit. We can never give too much thanks to God!

Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

A 12-year-old boy named David was born without an immune system. He underwent a bone marrow transplant in order to correct the deficiency. Up to that point he had spent his entire life in a plastic bubble in order to prevent exposure to common germs, bacteria, and viruses that could kill him. He lived without ever knowing human contact. When asked what he'd like to do if and when released from his protective bubble, he replied, "I want to walk barefoot on grass, and touch my mother's hand."

Get it right. We have it so good. We need to enjoy it much more; we express it so little. Give thanks. You think about that.