

“Thanksgiving Easter Eggs”
Reverend Bill Gause
Overbrook Presbyterian Church
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 15, 2020

Scripture Readings:

Philippians 4:4-7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Psalm 100: 1,4

¹Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth...

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you



Sermon: *“Thanksgiving Easter Eggs”*

Believe it or not, Thanksgiving is next week. Which means Christmas will be here pretty soon, too. And that’s a good thing because we need a little Thanksgiving and Christmas joy right now. I don’t have to tell all of you that it’s been a hard year. There’s no need to recount all of the struggles of the last 8 months or so. Suffice to say things have changed, a lot. We can’t go to football games like we used to. Ohio State’s game this week was actually cancelled. We can’t go to church like we used to. We can’t gather for holidays like we used to. We can’t go out like we used to. Mary & I have eaten at a restaurant once in the last 8 months, and that was at a table outside on the sidewalk. We wear masks all the time. We don’t shake hands. We sometimes get looked down upon for wearing masks and not shaking hands. We’ve lost a significant portion of the things that feel normal. So, when we see Thanksgiving coming up in just a few days, a reasonable response might be, “What have we got for which to be thankful?”

Sometimes it can be easier to see what you’ve lost than what you have, and yet scripture repeatedly tells us that everything we have and everything we are come from God. Scripture repeatedly encourages us to be thankful to God and to express our thanksgiving to God for those blessings. But whether we can express thanks or not depends completely on whether we are able to see what we have been given. The question of the moment is this: In times of hardship, can you still see what you have? Or only what you have lost? Because what you see, in large part, is going to depend on what you’re looking for.

I’ll give you an example. Your favorite movies and TV shows often have little details right there on screen that you might not notice if you’re not looking for them. Sometimes those details are mistakes, as when someone famously left a Starbucks cup on a table in the show Game of Thrones.

¹ But often those little details are put there on purpose. We call them easter eggs. On the long-running series Friends, there was a magna-doodle board in the background on a wall in Joey and Chandler’s apartment that featured a drawing or a message that changed with each episode.² In the Disney movie Frozen, Rapunzel, from the Disney movie Tangled, appears as a guest at Elsa’s coronation.³ And in the movie Star Wars: The Phantom Menace, if you were really paying attention, you might have spotted the aliens from the movie ET in one of the crowd scenes.⁴ At least one crime was actually solved in 2009 by a

sharp-eyed art historian who noticed a long-lost Avant Garde painting that had been stolen in the 1920's being used as a prop in the background of the movie *Stuart Little*.⁵

Certainly, those little details, mistakes, and easter eggs are going to be hard to see if you're only trying to follow the story. If your focus is always on the main characters and what's happening in the foreground, you are probably going to miss some interesting details and funny references built into the background. But if you're looking for them, you're definitely going to see them.

You see, sometimes we get so focused on one thing that we miss another. In what has been a difficult year, it can be really easy to see only what we've lost. But the challenge of thanksgiving is to actually look around for the blessings. And when we do, we'll see that there are still plenty of them there to celebrate.

This year I am thankful for Will Grey's rapid recovery from surgery. Yes, that was a hard process, and we won't know for a while whether it was successful or not. But I am extremely thankful for his surgeon, and doctors, nurses, and staff at Nationwide Children's Hospital, and for rapid recovery and minimal pain.

I am thankful for Harry's teachers and staff at Bridgeway Academy. I am thankful for Mary with whom I walk this journey every day. I am thankful for street burritos from the La Poblana food truck and I'm thankful for the way that even bad ice cream is still pretty good.

Now, I'm not simply saying "Hey, look on the bright side. Don't worry be happy." This isn't a Pollyanna sentimentality that dismisses how hard our struggles really are. Those struggles are real. The difficulty we experience through all this is not an illusion. But God's gifts are real, too. And they are abundant. Sometimes all it takes is for us to change our focus to see them. And that may take some work. But it's work we are called to do.

When Philippians says "Rejoice," that is an imperative. It's a command. Same thing when the Psalms say to "give thanks" and when 1 Thessalonians says "Rejoice" and "give thanks." These are imperatives. These passages of scripture call on us to recognize God's goodness and give thanks, not just when it's easy, but even when it's difficult.

Remember, those first pilgrims we always talk about on Thanksgiving, when they gave thanks to God, they were celebrating simple survival. They were thankful to have made it through that first year, to have roofs over the heads, and crops in the field. Even though they had lost loved ones. Even though the future was incredibly uncertain, they gave thanks for a bountiful harvest in a time of hardship and scarcity.

And President Abraham Lincoln actually issued his proclamation establishing a day of thanksgiving as a national holiday in 1863,⁶ when we were still in the midst of the Civil War. A time when there was plenty of loss and grief and pain to go around.

We have always given thanks, in times of war and national emergency, in times of grief, in times of uncertainty, because we understand that no matter what we have lost, we are still blessed and it is still true that everything we have and everything we are, come from God.

Now I get it. We may not feel particularly joyful or even hopeful this year. But in times when you don't feel particularly thankful, it's important to remember that this is called *Thanks-Giving*, not *Thanks-Feeling*. Even in times of loss, we are called to give thanks to God.

And that's not because God is so desperate for attention and affirmation that even when we are suffering God needs us to say "Thank you." The process of giving thanks is about our being able to recognize the ways we have been blessed, even when we struggle to see them. God is always reaching out to us, providing, caring, enriching. Giving thanks is about us reaching back towards God. And in those times when we can't readily see the goodness in our lives, those are the times when we have to look the hardest.

Next week is the Thanksgiving holiday. It will probably be very different from any we've experienced before. Gathering with extended family may not be advisable or even possible. Which means so many of the traditions of the day may need to be set aside this year. But remember that Biblically, giving thanks to God is always about our relationship with God and our acknowledging that God is good, all the time, and that all the time, God is good. Big family gatherings and extravagant dinners, pumpkin pies and football on TV, and hitting the Black Friday sales, are more about our own enjoyment. They are the ways we have traditionally celebrated. And we will certainly notice the difference this year without them. We will mourn those lost opportunities to be with family and those chances to make memories. But we will still be able to acknowledge the goodness, grace, mercy, and love of God. Because there is still much for which to be thankful. If only we will look, we will see, and give thanks.

To God be all glory, honor, power, dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.

End Notes

¹ Savov, Vlad. "Is that a Starbucks cup in Game of Thrones?" Verge, 6 May. 2019, www.theverge.com/2019/5/6/18530917/game-of-thrones-got-season-8-hbo-final-last-of-the-starks-starbucks-coffee-cup-blooper.

² "Here's the Secret Meaning Behind Every Single Magna Doodle In Friends." Comedy Central UK, 19 Nov. 2020, www.comedycentral.co.uk/news/the-ultimate-guide-to-every-magna-doodle-featured-in-friends.

³ Brandon, Emily. "Spotted: Rapunzel and Flynn at Elsa's Coronation in Frozen | Oh My Disney." Oh My Disney, 15 Apr. 2016, ohmy.disney.com/news/2013/12/10/spotted-rapunzel-and-flynn-at-elsas-coronation.

⁴ "Asogian." Wookieepedia, 17 Nov. 2020, starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Asogian.

⁵ "Stuart Little leads art historian to long-lost Hungarian masterpiece." the Guardian, 22 Feb. 2018, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/27/stuart-little-art-historian-long-lost-hungarian-masterpiece.

⁶ "Thanksgiving Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln." 11 Feb. 2018, www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/thanks.htm.