

“A LOT OF REASONS TO BE THANKFUL”

Date: Nov. 19, 2006

Text: Psalm 85

I have noticed in browsing around toy stores looking for gifts for our grandchildren a resurgence of interest in Winnie the Pooh characters. That reminded me of an incident in one of the Pooh stories involving Eeyore, the pessimistic donkey. He was complaining to Pooh that nobody ever visited to him. Pooh replied that surely someone had visited him recently. Eeyore responded, “Oh well, I guess someone did come last month.”

I mention that story because often don't we, like Eeyore, tend to forget the many blessings that God has given to us in daily life? We get so caught up in all the things that need to be done or the things that aren't going our way that we neglect to thank God for His continuing presence and love each day.

Our forefathers certainly knew what they were doing when they set aside a day to pause and give thanks. Theoretically, every day should be an occasion of thanksgiving but the reality, which I am sure we all would agree, is that all too often we get caught up in the negative side of life and forget to be grateful people... **THUS, WE NEED THE FOURTH THURSDAY OF NOVEMBER EVERY YEAR TO STOP AND COUNT OUR BLESSINGS!**

Let's begin the sermon by “counting our blessings, one by one” to echo the old song and use the words of the psalmist in Psalm 85 to develop a list of reasons to be thankful. This psalm, unlike much media Christianity today, however, doesn't try to sugarcoat everything and pretend that nothing is wrong instead the writer tells it like it is.

Hence the **psalmist reminds us to include prayers for God's mercy for what has been left undone as part of our Thanksgiving agenda.** The need for repentance, which isn't recognized much today, either privately or in public, rather than being a “downer” is the beginning of true thanksgiving and opens the door to seeing all that that God is trying to do in our midst.

Repentance is called for because certainly more needs to be done in a wealthy country like ours to help God's people in need. Some day historians are going to record that AIDS was far worse around the globe than the bubonic plague in the Middle Ages and too little was done to stop the epidemic. Surely more needs to be done to provide health care for everyone and greater support for struggling parents. Those are just examples of how individuals and nations have fallen far short of divine expectations. Thanksgiving is the perfect day for such repentance because we will enjoy a bounty of food that surpasses what many people in the world have to eat in a month!

Now let's begin our list: On Thursday, again using the thoughts of Psalm 85, let us give thanks for God's peace, which always is at work in the world. The skeptic might reply, “The psalmist promised peace. Where is that happening? Has there been a great movement in that direction at any level of life in 2006?” Obviously, the war in Iraq still goes on and the newspapers tell us about too much domestic violence but there is another side to the story. I hope you won't mind if throughout this sermon I point to small happenings in this congregation as signs of compassionate behavior that seldom get noticed in the headlines. Here are two small signs of God's shalom: Our part of this year's peace offering went to help the local migrant daycare center while the after school program, which received our share of last year's offering, continues to serve a great purpose. I also think of the people who gave of their time and energy to go to New Orleans or work in the Susquehanna Valley. So much more could be mentioned but the psalmist calls us to look for those places where “love and faithfulness meet” and to give thanks.

Next on the list when we sit down in celebration Thursday, is to pause and give thanks for all that God has provided. The pictures that were shown earlier in the service remind us of the beauty of Upstate NY. You would think that no reminders were needed when so much beauty is all around us and yet don't we take for grant just how lovely Upstate is? Add to nature's blessings riches that go far beneath the surface of life: family, friends, a teacher in school who touched us or a doctor who gently looks after us.

Even more on Thursday think of God's love freely given in Jesus the Christ and what that has meant in our daily affairs. Again don't we frequently take too casually what God has done in sending Christ? Oh, we get excited around Dec. 25th but how about the rest of the year? We are called into a partnership in which we live not by our ways but by the Almighty's as we strive to measure up to his commandments. Few of us appreciate enough what it means to believe in a God who cares about us so much and has chosen to involve himself in human destiny

Adding to the list, Thanksgiving gives us a glorious opportunity to say a prayer on behalf of righteousness and justice. "Righteousness," according to Psalm 85, basically means treating people fairly and with respect and understanding. In another part of the Hebrew scriptures Isaiah 58 challenges God's people to stand up for those who are suffering from the inequities of our society. Does it not say something that every year the use of food cupboards here in Batavia, in Rochester and across the country increases? Martin Luther King kept reminding us that Biblically there could be no real prosperity until all of God's people are included.

Finally for our list, do we ever count this community of faith as one of our blessings? Again the earlier photos remind us of the ministry that goes on in so many ways through this congregation. I give thanks for the way this congregation responded to Florence Williams tragic and unexpected death. I give thanks for moments when people listen and offer encouragement to someone who is going through a hard time. I give thanks for family nights, for church-school teachers, for the wonderful music each Sunday and for all who let our children know how much we care about them.

Do you see why I say there are a lot of reasons to be thankful as Thanksgiving, 2006 approaches? Of course, we'd like to have a few less aches and pains. Sure, we wish the war in Iraq would come to an end and our soldiers could come home. Definitely, the weather in November could have been better. There is a lot wrong with our world but there also is a lot that is right. Psalm 85 would have us never forget one very basic fact: God is very much a part of our lives.

The words of this country/western song may say it best

I've never made a fortune and it's probably too late now.
But I don't worry about that much, I'm happy anyhow.

And as I go along life's way, I'm reaping better than I sow
I'm drinking from my saucer, 'cause my cup has overflowed.

Haven't got a lot of riches, and sometimes the going's tough.
But I've got loving ones around me and that makes me rich enough

I thank God for his blessings, and the mercies He's bestowed.
I'm drinking from my saucer 'cause my cup has overflowed.

I remember times when things went wrong, my faith wore thin.
But all at once the dark clouds broke, and the sun peeped out again.

So Lord, help me not to gripe about the tough rows that I've hoed
I'm drinking from my saucer because my cup has overflowed

If God gives me strength and courage, when the way grows steep and rough
I'll not ask for other blessings, I'm already blessed enough

And may I never be too busy to help others bear their loads.
Then I'll keep drinking from my saucer 'cause my cup has overflowed

Whether it be the beauty of the hills and lakes around us, the love of family gathered at the table or a phone call when we are all alone, there is cause for rejoicing and great reason to thank the One who makes it all possible, the Holy One, we call God Almighty.