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'Tis the Season
2 Corinthians 9:6-15

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry, you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

The other day, I was driving the kids to basketball practice and my Presbyterian children were talking about the Trinity with a friend of theirs who goes to a Catholic Church. Now I grew up Catholic and have spent a good deal of time studying the differences between the two theological traditions. I appreciated that they were trying to nuance the differences between the faiths but what these kids were throwing around as doctrine was straight up heresy.

The Catholic kid says, *"Well in my church we have two God's, God and Jesus, and Jesus came to earth because he is the God who likes to fight."*

The Presbyterians responded, *"Well, my church has just one God, but Jesus works for that God, and he has to do what God wants him to do, which is why he came to earth."*

I nearly crashed the car. Some parents will not tolerate bad language in their cars, I will not tolerate bad theology. First of all, Jesus did not come to earth because he likes to fight and no you do not have two God's, it is one God, three persons who are the same in substance, different in form.

And secondly, Jesus does not work for God, they are equal in power but different in form. And Jesus did not come to earth because he was told to do so but out of his great love for creation! My sermon was not well received by the audience. The truth is the mysteries of God, the work of the Trinity, the salvation offered to us through the acts of Jesus are all very difficult concepts to articulate. What they were wrestling with is basic Christianity 101 – the real mysteries of our faith – how did Jesus come, how does God work, what does it mean for Jesus to have been among us – what does the grace of God look like and mean for our lives.

Paul spent so much time writing on these basic concepts in his letters to the churches. They were full of doctrine and sermons about Christianity 101. He wanted the churches to have strong faith and proper belief so that they wouldn't be thrown off when others came to town preaching different versions of the story. In the passage today, Paul is telling them what it is like to receive God's grace and how we should respond to it. In Paul's second letter to his friends in Corinth, he wants to remind them to be grateful to God because of the grace they have received. Paul urges them to be generous in their giving and be generous in their spirit, as the proper response to the grace of Jesus Christ.

Then Paul writes, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" This is such a great line. If you are trying to describe the gift of Jesus it is almost impossible to do an adequate job. I appreciate that even the great communicator, The Apostle Paul, admitted that the grace of God is in many ways indescribable. And yet, he so clearly tells them that the absolute best response to the grace of God is gratitude.

In his *Church Dogmatics*, Theologian Karl Barth said, "To believe in Jesus Christ means to become thankful." Barth elaborates that believing in Jesus Christ should prompt us to gratitude because whatever else may happen to us, we have received God's grace – grace secured for us through the life and death of Jesus Christ. God's grace should evoke human gratitude, Barth said, like a voice causes an echo. Like lightning causes thunder. Grace and gratitude go together.

'Tis the season for gratitude, as we celebrate the great American holiday of Thanksgiving on Thursday. This week ahead is our annual pilgrimage for the sake of gratitude. We will get into our planes, trains, and automobiles so we can gather around a table and pause from our routines, count our blessings, and give thanks to God for our lives. It is a really important moment in the year because we spend so much of the year – working, striving, struggling, advancing, earning, comparing, worrying, and grieving. We spend much of the year feeling the opposite of thankful – we feel like we are struggling, lacking, running low, or that we have never have enough. Some of those feelings are real and some of those feelings are fictional.

Global fundraiser Lynn Twist in her book *The Soul of Money*, writes: "For me, and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is "I didn't get enough sleep." "The next one is "I don't have enough time." Whether true or not, that thought of not enough occurs automatically before we even think to question or examine it. We spend most of the hours and the days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don't have enough of...This internal condition of scarcity, this mind-set of scarcity, lives at the very heart of our jealousies, our greed, our prejudice, and our arguments with life."

The truth is we all have a lot to be grateful for whether it has been an awful year or a hard year – there are still blessings to be counted. Switching our mindset to count those blessings instead of assessing what we lack will make us all much happier – even if we can't maintain that mindset for the whole year. At least once awhile shifting from scarcity to gratitude is important. Author Brooks in his book *Build the Life you Want*, talks about how he doesn't write New Year's Resolutions for himself instead he creates a list of everything he actually did in the last year. He traveled, he saw friends, he wrote books, he read books, he plays sports, he saw concerts. He

writes it all down and then at the end of the exercise he feels so grateful for all he has done, and he stops thinking about the things he didn't accomplish or really should be doing in the year ahead. That's just a mindset shift – what do we have versus what are we missing.

You can spend Thanksgiving comparing your day to others, or your lot in life to others, but it will steal your joy. Every single one of us has received the indescribable gift of grace through Jesus Christ and so we have that to be thankful for if nothing else. Jesus is just first on the list for all of us. What do we have to be thankful for – starting with the indescribable gift of God's grace in the person of Jesus Christ and then go from there. Write it all down – the stuff from the last year that you are grateful for – the people, the places, the experiences, the learnings, the goodness – and lift those things up under the umbrella of God's grace. It is a good exercise. Meister Eckhart wrote, "If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, 'Thank you', that would suffice." This is the season to say thank you, to be grateful, to celebrate, and to remember God's grace.

In Christine Pohl's book *Living into Community*, she tells a story about a church worker who had spent several years with refugees in Latin America. She described how the refugee camps were structured. "As soon as the refugees begin to make a new camp, they set up three committees. There was the committee of education and the committee of construction and there was the committee of joy. Celebration was basic to the life of the refugees – as basic as teaching their children to read or building latrines. It seemed a little crazy from the outside – a waste of time. But the refugees knew that celebration kept them going in the midst of their struggle. It reminded them their lives did not consist only of hardship and labor. Refreshment and joy were among God's gifts to them. So, they practiced joy and gratitude."

We must practice joy and gratitude because they are part of the experience of being human. They are part of the blessing of being God's creation. We must remember that as much as we struggle, on one hand, or as much as we have accomplished, on the other hand, we live but by the grace of God. So let us pause in this coming week to reflect upon the indescribable gift of God's great love for the world and of the many blessings that surround our days.

This year, I'm going to make a list. I hope you will too.

Happy Thanksgiving to you and those you love.

Thanks be to God. Amen.