

## Colossians 1: 9-14

<sup>9</sup> For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. <sup>11</sup> May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. <sup>13</sup> He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

### Trinity Presbyterian Church

5/14/2017

### Mother's Day

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#### “Embodying New Creation: Growing Gratitude”

**Intro:** Imagine St. Paul in prison. Go down the stone steps into the bowels of the dungeon where he sits. He's been incarcerated for preaching the gospel. See him under the flickering light as shadows dance over the walls like ghosts. Look in the corner how the water seeps through the cracks in the cement foundation. Listen to Paul's chains rattling as he handwrites a note to a young church who he's trying to mother along in the faith. “Have strength,” he scribbles. “Keep enduring with patience while being thankful to God. Live a life worthy of the Lord.”

**Move 1:** As we begin, we admit our life is shaped by the gospel. What we do, who we are, the way we live our lives is challenged by our faith. Maybe we grew up in the church where our parents would drag us along on Sunday mornings. We'd get pinched on the cheek, color in our Jesus coloring books, eat Cheerios in the pews. But then we also noticed how people selflessly cared about each other. So the older we got the more faith challenged us to realize our life was more than our self-centered ambitions. Or maybe we didn't grow up in the church, but there was something about the good news stories that hooked us. The gospel snagged us and it hasn't let us go. Of course, our faith doesn't only form us personally, it forms us socially as well. Perhaps we are talking with a neighbor and they launch into their list of issues with “them.” How *they* are the problem. *They* are the ones who are to blame for our economy. We might be tempted to say nothing, but then out of our mouth spills, “Well ‘*they*’ are our neighbor too.” Live a life worthy of the Lord, says St. Paul. If we're hung up on the “worthy” word, maybe we substitute it for the word, “reflect.” Live a life that *reflects* the Lord. Both in our personal lives *as well as* in the social world. What we do, who we are, the way we live is challenged by our faith.

**Move 2:** So no wonder Paul prays over the early church, “Be made strong...Keep enduring with patience.” It takes patience to keep enduring, doesn’t it? Just ask the mothers who are in the room. If we were to ask them what their prayer would be to help them endure motherhood. The universal answer would probably be “more patience!” The same holds true for those who live as resurrection people in the world. Takes patience if we are to keep enduring. In her book, *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit says we live in an era of disillusionment because we don’t get the immediate social changes that we work for. We march, sign petitions, yet injustice doesn’t yield. Yet, we forget that the struggle for women’s rights to vote took a grueling 75 years. The fight for Civil Rights lasted almost 100 years and there is still much more to accomplish. But like the Israelites who got lost in the wilderness for 40 years, the road to the Promised Land is going to take multiple generations, with many detours along the way. No wonder St. Paul prays over the early church, “Be strong in God’s strength. Keep enduring with patience.” As we live as people shaped by the gospel, it is a prayer to be prayed over us, too. Keep enduring with patience.

**Move 3:** But hold on! There’s an important tagline on the end of the phrase. Keep at it, *while being grateful to God*. It’s an odd thing to say. Usually when patience is wearing thin, gratitude does not come easy. But see, being grateful opens our eyes to the bigger picture. So perhaps when one of our kiddos is melting down during worship, we don’t know what to say to the rosy-cheeked parent. Maybe with a soft tone we tell them, “I thank God for you.” Because in the big picture we *are grateful* to God for them. Or maybe there’s been an issue at the workplace. Oh, how people can be difficult sometimes. As we are in the path of their fury, imagine what might happen if we looked at them and said, “You know, I give thanks to God for you.” Gratitude is like a diffuser to the detonator. A resistant to the resentment. An antidote to our fear. It says we are paying attention to God’s grace at play even in our hardest moments. Read a story about a man who was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Except every morning, his routine was to say, “Thank you, God.” Even the mornings when he found hair scattered on his pillow case he kept saying thank you. Then the last words on his lips just before he sank away, “Thank you, God.” Gratitude widens our perspective. Gives birth to joy. Recognizes grace alive even in the hardest moments. Keep up endurance. Be patient. Then Paul drops the crucial tagline: *while being grateful to God*.

**Move 4:** So, how are we doing? How’s our thankfulness meter these days? Too often we allow negative emotions to rule the day. Stress from work. Health declining. Still we need to keep naming the gifts that are like feathers tickling our spirits alive. The more we do it, the more normal it becomes. So maybe it’s time we restart our gratitude jars. Naming one grace per day on a slip of paper and putting it into the jar. Over a month or two we watch as the gratitude begins to overflow. Maybe just before we go to bed at night we practice the Examine Prayer—where we examine what we are both most and least grateful for about the day. Perhaps we

grab our morning coffee and breathe on the front stoop. Listening to morning birds flirt as the squirrels trapeze from tree to tree. After practicing a while our gratitude muscle gets built so we are alert to being thankful even when things aren't going our way. Too often the hard stuff trumps the positive. Perhaps it's time to start filling the jar. Time to fill the meter with thankfulness.

**Conclusion:** So we begin by practicing now. As resurrection people who keep earnestly saying thank you, even during difficult times. Doesn't matter if we're lifelong pew warmers, or dipping our toes in faith's current for the first time. All of us want to look back on life with gratitude. Saying "thank you, God" for a life molded by the gospel. For a life worthy of the Lord.