“Blessed to Be a Blessing”

Deuteronomy 8:7–18 & 2 Corinthians 9:6–15 ~ *October 11, 2026 ~ Trinity United ~ Rev. G. Scott Turnbrook.*

Have you noticed how our brains are very proficient at focusing on problems? We walk into a room and notice the one lightbulb that is burned out, the one chair that is crooked, the one thing that needs fixing. Meanwhile, we can walk past twenty things working perfectly without giving them a second thought. Perhaps that is one reason the practice of thanksgiving is so important. Thanksgiving is MORE than turkey dinners! Thanksgiving is living gratitude and stopping long enough to notice what is good. Because sometimes we need to be reminded: there is more going right in our lives than our brains are naturally inclined to notice. There is an old wisdom saying attributed to the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart: “*If the only prayer you said in your whole life was: ‘Thank you,’ that would suffice*.” I love that idea because it suggests that thanksgiving is not simply one prayer among many. Thanksgiving must become a way of living. It is a way of looking at our lives in gratitude and saying: “I have received so much.”

Thanksgiving…more than turkey dinners; more than saying grace, more than feeling happy when life is ‘on track’. Thanksgiving leads us to a way of gratitude; a way of seeing differently. The Asian Journal of Social Psychology recently reported that there have been just under 3,000 research studies increasingly exploring gratitude. And, these investigations have uncovered what different world religions have been teaching all along: gratitude contributes to our well-being, positive emotions, life’s satisfaction, and our willingness to act generously toward others. Gratitude does something inside us. It changes our perspective, how we experience life, and sometimes (even) how we treat our neighbour.

The Deuteronomy text takes us back to the wilderness wanderings of the Hebrew people on their way to the Promised Land. Israel has wandered through difficult and uncertain days. Days when there wasn't enough food or water and when the future itself was very uncertain. Moses now imagines them standing on the other side of that wilderness, looking at a land filled with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, olive trees and honey: an image of abundance. But then comes Moses’ warning: when you arrive there, DON’T forget. When the cupboards are full, don't forget the wilderness. When the harvest is plentiful, don't forget the manna. When the house is secure, don't forget the journey. When you are comfortable, don't forget the God who carried you when you were not. “Remember the Lord your God,” Moses says, “for it is God who gives you power to get wealth.”

The danger, Moses points us to, is forgetting. The danger is beginning to tell ourselves, “I did this all by myself. I worked hard. I figured it out…I earned it…I built it.” Gratitude interrupts that illusion of self-sufficiency. When I am grateful, I am forced to acknowledge that I did not get here entirely by myself. Think about it. Every one of us is here BECAUSE of countless people who have contributed something to our lives: parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, neighbours, colleagues, mentors, people who believed in us when we weren't particularly convinced ourselves. And then there are the people whose names we will never know…the farmer who grew the food, the person who drove the truck, the person who stocked the grocery store, the people who built the roads and bridges and countless systems that quietly sustain our lives. Gratitude helps us see the web of relationships that makes our lives possible.

There is a great illusion in modern life telling us we are independent individuals. Gratitude says, “Actually, no. You are connected. You are a recipient. You have received. You have been helped. You have been loved. You have been carried. You have been given more than you could ever give back.” And once we shatter that myth, our question changes. Instead of asking, “How much can I keep?” we begin pondering, “What am I charged to do with what I have received?” This brings us to Paul’s letter to Corinth. He takes the whole idea of receiving and focuses it through the lens of generosity. “*Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*.” Paul is not offering a spiritual investment strategy. He isn't saying, “Give God twenty dollars and God will give you forty dollars back.” Paul is talking about something much deeper. God provides “seed to the sower” and we, in turn, give back. Let us be clear on the direction: God gives. We receive. We give. Others receive. The gift doesn't end with the giver. The gift travels outward.

And this is where the psychology of gratitude and the theology of generosity meet. Because gratitude doesn't simply make us feel better individually. It turns our attention outward. If I believe that everything I have is entirely mine, I naturally become protective of it. But if I begin to see my life as something I have received, then I begin to ask, “What can I do with what this gift entrusted to my stewardship?” That is the movement Paul is describing. Paul points us towards Thanksgiving as a spiritual practice. And I think it is particularly important for us at Trinity as we finalize our visioning process. We have been looking backward at our history. Asking what we value as we continue to become. We have also been talking about the things that have made Trinity meaningful. What we want to carry forward. What we feel called to become for the care of the larger community. Gratitude for the past, and the sharing of that legacy for the generations into the future. And, I am so excited to see your responses come in over the week ahead.

As I began our conversation this morning, we talked about how our minds are remarkably good at noticing what is wrong: noticing the squeaky door; the missing parking spot; the person who didn't call; the bill that increased; the weather that isn’t what we hoped for. We sometimes even notice the one thing that went badly in a day when nineteen went well. While our brains are wired to pay attention to threats and problems, this does not serve us when it RULES our living! Gratitude gives us an additional lens (when we use it). It teaches us to notice what is good…not instead of what is difficult, but alongside it. Gratitude is NOT rose-coloured glasses or pretending everything is wonderful. Gratitude is meant to be A PART of our whole perspective, So, you can be grateful and grieving at the same time. You can be grateful and angry. You can be grateful and uncertain. You can be grateful and still know that something needs to change. The Israelites knew that. They had been through the wilderness. They didn't pretend the wilderness never happened. They remembered it. And then they gave thanks for the land. Gratitude doesn't erase their wilderness. It helps recognize that wilderness is not the ENTIRE story.

Perhaps this can be one of the gifts we offer another. What if we became people who help each other truly remember what is good. What if we became people of gratitude. It becomes that wonderful shift into the oft-used term ‘Thanks-living’. Imagine what happens when gratitude moves through a congregation, through a family, through an individual. We say, “I am thankful for the music.” Someone else says, “I am thankful for the person who welcomed me.” Someone says, “I am thankful that my children grew up here.” Someone says, “I am thankful that I can come here and be myself.” Someone says, “I am thankful that this church cares about what is happening beyond these walls.” Someone says, “I am thankful I am welcome irregardless of my sexuality or gender identity”. We still have the work of ministry to do; but, I’m also grateful. And when we remembering gifts, we see generosity, w see possibility…We see HOPE!

When we distill it all down, thanksgiving leads us to the very heart of the gospel. Because Christianity begins with receiving. Before we ever do anything for God, we first receive. We receive life…grace…love…forgiveness… community. We receive Christ. And then, having received, we become people who give. What we receive becomes what we give. God's love becomes our love. God's generosity becomes our generosity. God's welcome becomes our welcome. God's compassion becomes our compassion. God's abundance becomes our abundance. Not because we have unlimited resources, but because we stop imagining that everything begins and ends with us.

And perhaps this is the deepest gift of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is not simply looking backward and saying, “Look at all the wonderful things we have received.” Thanksgiving is looking backward and then turning around. We Remember…We Give thanks…We Imagine…We Give. So, on this Thanksgiving Sunday, I invite you to hold two questions in your heart. The first is personal: What am I grateful for? Not the easy, automatic answer, but what is one gift in my life that I have, perhaps, stopped noticing? The second question springs from the first: Given what God has entrusted to me, what might God be asking me to do?

Thanksgiving is not a day on the calendar. It is a way of seeing, a way of living, loving and serving. May we be thanksgiving people! May we be a thanksgiving community!

Amen.