

Give Thanks in Everything

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Probably most of us here have some things that aren't absolutely perfect in our lives and even if today happens to be a good day, probably tomorrow we'll have something that isn't just as we would like it to be. So I'd ask you, do you give thanks whatever it's like? Or do you just give thanks when it's going well?

See, if you give thanks just when it's going well, well really what you're saying is "I don't know that you still love me and that you still are looking after things." But when you give thanks when everything is coming apart, then you're saying to Him, "I know that you're there and I know that you still love me and I know that you're working this out for my benefit. In fact, I know that even though Joseph's brothers meant evil for him and selling him into slavery, you meant it for good. So I know that that's the same with me. Even though my boss has just fired me or even though my friends have criticized me or even though I know other people are trying to do me harm, I know that it only appears to be their hands that are on the trigger. Actually their hands are only on the trigger that you allow them to put their hands on and in fact they can't do anything that you do not allow them to do and I know you love me. So I know that however this appears to the world and however even men and women may hope it will turn out for me, I know that you still love me and I know that you want this for me." Do you see it that way?

Because, after all, the way you deal with a common liar is, "I believe you've given me the gift when I have it in my hand, not before it's in my hand will I believe you." That's the way you deal with a common liar. But not with a God who has given you and me so many proofs of his kindness and his generosity.

Just feel your old nose -- even if it has a bump in it like mine it's nice to have a nose, isn't it? The chin, it's so good to have things like that that no man has given you and no man could give you and yet this dear God has given you it. Now you think of all the nice things that happen to you and that you didn't expect. The little serendipities that you came across and you realize that he was working all those things out for you. Then you see he allows a cloud to come across the sun to develop your belief that the sun is there so that whenever your eyes don't work anymore, you'll still be able to sense the sun. So he allows the clouds to come across it for a moment, but you don't then treat him as a common liar.

"I won't believe you love me. I won't thank you for your gifts until I have a good gift in my hand that I can recognize as good." So loved ones how do you deal with him? That's the heart of Carothers' books -- you know Carothers, he wrote "Prison to Praise", isn't that it, and "Power in Praise" and he pointed out that the way through to God's will for your life was praising him and thanking him whatever in all circumstances.

Then Carothers was so good you know that's why I shared with you last Sunday about Roger and the cancer. He is so good, he says, "You don't praise God for the results that he is going to work as the result of your praise." You don't praise God for what he may do through the cancer that Roger has. You don't praise God for the glory that will come to him when Roger is healed.

You praise God for the cancer. Why? Because the Father will not allow anything to come to us from Satan unless he can work it for our good. So sure he hasn't sent the cancer. Sure he hasn't sent the

sin. Sure he hasn't sent the unhappiness that you have in your life at present, but he has allowed it to come because there is something that he is able to work in you through that and so it's his permissive will. So you thank him for it and you praise him for it and you stop straining against him and having a controversy with him. So loved ones do you see it?

It's very different, when a thing happens, to have not just that old kind of praise God as a kind of abracadabra, but a heartfelt thanks to God because you know that he is in charge and he is allowing this to come and he wants the very best for you. He is at peace, he is not sweating, he is not perspiring, he is not all worked up, he is not on tranquilizers. If he loves you so much that he gave his son to die for you and still he can look at your terrible situation and be at peace. And don't forget you can't say to him, "Oh yeah, but it was him, it would be different." Because it is him. He is touched with all your infirmities and everything you touch, he touches too. But if he can be at peace then why can't we relax?

Why can't we say 'Lord thank you'? Really as the dear book says you know, "Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." Give thanks in all circumstances, and you see what it does, it steadies everything. That's it.

Do you know that cancer isn't a problem? Do you realize that? Far worse things than dying, far worse things than going into the new life that we were made for. Far worse things than going and meeting the King of kings, far worse things than being in a place where there is continual peace and joy and love, far worse things than that. So it isn't that cancer is the problem. It isn't the bankruptcy that's the problem, it isn't the money trouble that is the problem, it isn't the job that is the problem, it isn't even your family and those awkward creatures you live with at home that is the problem, it isn't all of that. The problem is that you allow those things to be little messages to you, 'The world is crumbling', and it's not crumbling.

The dear God who loves you is steady as a rock and has you in his hands and is saying to you, "I am here, I am here. Don't look at those things that look as if the world is shaking. Those are silly superficial symptoms, I am here and I ain't moving and you're in my hands and this will be the same afterwards as it was before." That's it.

Every time you thank him, you give him delight and joy because he knows that one more little one that he made really believes him and trusts him and that's so great you know. Oh you dads you know, how good it is to have a little son who just feels everything is safe because he is in his dad's arms. His dad may be trembling and wonder what's going to happen but he is in his dad's arms so he is happy.

And boy, that gives a father some feeling. Actually encourages even the father. Now you can imagine the delight and joy in our God's heart when you give thanks in all circumstances. It's a declaration, "Lord I trust you -- not these circumstances, not these events, not the good things that happen to me, any fool can be happy when things are good, any fool can thank God when he is receiving gifts -- but I trust you Lord even when I can't see." And you remember King George V, wasn't it, died you remember of some blood circulation disease.

I remember one radio broadcast years ago in Britain. He talked about the man, of course who came in the darkness and said, "Put your hand in mine and even though you do not know the way through the darkness, if you keep your hand in mine, I will lead you through the darkness." Now by giving thanks to him, he is saying, "Lord I can't see the way myself, but I have no doubt that you know the way."

So loved ones will you think about it. You know as Mona sang it: "Do you give thanks when it counts? When things are not obviously good, do you give thanks when things are bad? Do you declare to God, I do not worship the creature, I worship the creator, I do not trust circumstances, I trust my God", and that gives him joy and delight.

I was in London about three weeks ago and as we men always do, we buy our wives presents that we would like to have, so I bought her a present and she lent it to me. It's this one. It's the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England and it was written in the 1600's, before America was born, in the 1600's and is a blessed and a dear book. It comes of course from a church with a liturgical tradition.

You know what that means, the Church of England, the Church of Ireland even the Lutheran Church I think is in the liturgical tradition, the Catholic Church is in the liturgical tradition. They have liturgy, they have many prayers and services that are written down and printed and often of course in services they repeat those. They read them at times, at times they know them by heart, those of us maybe in Presbyterian churches, Baptist churches, Methodist churches are not in the liturgical tradition. And we, at Campus Church, are not at all in the liturgical tradition.

Now loved ones, I think sometimes we miss some deep and beautiful truths because we aren't. Because these were saintly men that wrote these words and so these are the words that are read and have been read for almost 400 years now in little parish churches throughout England when it comes to communion time. So, I will read you them.

"It is our duty to render most humble and hearty thanks to almighty God, our heavenly Father for that he has given his Son our Savior Jesus Christ not only to die for us, but also to be our spiritual food and sustenance in that Holy sacrament. Which being so divine and comfortable a thing to them who receive it worthily and so dangerous to them that will presume to receive it unworthily.

My duty is to exhort you to consider the dignity of that holy mystery and the great peril of the unworthy receiving thereof. And so to search and examine your own consciences and that not lightly. And not after the manner of dissemblers with God, but so that you may come holy and clean to such a heavenly feast in a marriage garment required by God in holy scripture and to be received as worthy partakers of that holy table.

The way it means there to is first, to examine your lives and conversations by the rule of God's commandments. And where and so ever you shall perceive yourselves to have offended either by will, word or deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness and to confess yourselves to almighty God with full purpose of amendment of life. And if you shall perceive your offenses be such as are not only against God but also against your neighbors, then you shall reconcile yourselves onto them. Being ready to make restitution and satisfaction according to the uttermost of your powers, for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any other. And being likewise ready to forgive others that have offended you as you would have forgiveness of your offenses at God's hands. For otherwise the receiving of the Holy Communion doth nothing else but increase your damnation.

Therefore if any of you be a blasphemer of God and hinderer or slanderer of his word, an adulterer or be in malice or envy or in any other grievest crime, repent you of your sins. Or else come not to this holy table lest after taking of that holy sacrament, the devil enter into you as he entered

into Judas and fill you full of all iniquities and bring you to destruction both of body and soul. And because it is requisite that no man should come to the Holy Communion but with a full trust in God's mercy and with a quiet conscience.

Therefore, if there be any of you who by this means, cannot quiet his own conscience herein but require a further comfort or counsel let them come to me or to some other discreet and learned minister of God's words and open his grief. That by the ministry of God's holy word he may receive the benefit of absolution together with ghostly counsel and advice to the quieting of his conscience and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."

You just have to thank God you know, for such good words. And I'd speak them to you loved ones, you don't need to be a member of Campus Church, don't need to be a member of any church to receive communion this morning but you do need to be honest with God about your sins. These are the sins that Jesus died for and it is a shame and it is a blasphemy to receive him while some of those sins still remain in your own will. So it is vital to repent of your sins before you receive His body and blood. And then when you receive the bread and the wine, the Holy Spirit will transform them into the very presence of Jesus' Spirit in your heart and you'll go out of here with a new desire and a new reason for living.

So I'd ask you loved ones to stand and receive the invitation.

You that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins and are in love and charity with your neighbors and intend to lead a new life following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in His Holy ways, draw near with faith and take this holy sacrament to your comfort and make your humble confession unto Almighty God.

Let us be seated as we pray.

We do not presume to come to this thy table, most merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table, but thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us therefore so to receive thy Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, that the bread we break may be unto us the communion of his body, and the cup of blessing, which we bless, may be the communion of his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us.

Dear God, we would confess our sins before you this morning one by one as we have committed them one by one. We would acknowledge that they are sins and we would tell you that we intend and resolve this day to turn from them and have nothing more to do with such actions and words and thoughts.