

Christ Community Covenant Church
Sacrifices of Thanksgiving
Pastor Dave Scherrer - July 3, 2011

The Freedom to be Thankful!

For several weeks now we have been listening to God as he has been speaking to us from Revelation 2 in His letters to the seven churches. We have seen God's pleasure in his churches for the perseverance of the saints in persecution, for their fierce hold to the truth and for their sacrifices. But God has also His concerns, concerns about a cooling of a first love and concerns about a sloppy defense against false teachers. We saw last week that God is deeply concerned about idolatry and immorality. God refers to these as the deep things of Satan.

Revelation 2:24

But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Psalms 107:22

And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!

When we give thanks to him from our hearts, God is magnified. Gratitude glorifies and magnifies God. That is an interesting idea – to “Magnify God” seems like an impossibility. How can I make God any bigger than He is by anything I do? It doesn't seem to make sense.

Here is the deal: Givers are more glorious than receivers. Benefactors are more glorious than beneficiaries. When we thank God, we acknowledge and confess that He is the giver; He is the benefactor. We pay Him a high compliment. When my daughters were angry at each other growing up they did not say, "Thank you," very easily. "Kristin, tell Heather, 'Thank you.'" So she mumbles, "Thank you." "Heather, say, 'You're welcome.'" So she mumbles, "You're welcome." And we all do this. Why? Isn't it because saying "thank you" is a compliment; it magnifies people: You did a good thing for me; I'm indebted to you. But when you are angry at somebody, you hate to pay them a compliment; you want to belittle them not magnify them; you hate to think of them as your benefactor. And because of pride and idolatry, we don't have to be very angry to be reluctant to give thanks. We just don't want to feel small and indebted.

So, when gratitude springs up in the human heart toward God, He is magnified as the wealthy source of our blessing. He is acknowledged as giver and benefactor and therefore as glorious. He becomes bigger in our understanding and in our worship. But when gratitude does not spring up in our hearts at God's great goodness to us, it probably means that we don't want to pay him a compliment; we don't want to magnify him as our benefactor.

And there is a very good reason that human beings by nature do not want to magnify God with thanksgiving or glorify him as their benefactor. The reason is that it detracts from their own glory, and all people by nature love their own glory more than the glory of God.

In Psalm 35:27 David says, "Let those who desire my vindication shout for joy and be glad and say forevermore, 'The *Lord* be magnified!'" And he contrasts this group of people who love to magnify the Lord with another group in verse 26, "Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor who *magnify themselves* against me." There are only two groups of people in the world whose differences from each other are of any eternal significance: those who love to magnify God and

those who love to magnify themselves. At the root of all ingratitude is the love of one's own greatness. For genuine gratitude admits that we are beneficiaries of an unearned bequest; we are cripples leaning on the cross shaped crutch of Jesus Christ, we are infants needing the aid of another for every moment of our lives. Our Natural self, scripture calls it the "old self" hates to think of itself in these images: unworthy beneficiary, cripple, needy child. These rob him of his 'glory' by giving it all to God. We tend to love our own glory, we want to control how others think of us. We prize our self-sufficiency and hate to think of ourselves as sin-sick and helpless. It is in repentance and genuine gratitude to the true God that we reduce ourselves and magnify God.

Psalm 50: 14-15

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and perform your vows to the Most High,
and call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

Psalm 50:23

The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me;
to one who orders his way rightly
I will show the salvation of God!

What are God's demands? What does an all-sufficient God, who owns and controls all things, demand from the creature he has made? His demand is great, but it is *not* that we be great, but that we cease to be great in our own eyes and become small that he might appear great. "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." "It is not the well who need a physician but those who are sick." Jesus has nothing to do for those who insist they are well. He demands something great: that we admit we are not great.

This is bad news to the arrogant, but words of hope to the oppressed and down-trodden who have given up their false pride and are seeking God.

And to those God says He will pour into their empty hearts such a love as they have never known. And there will arise freely and joyfully a sense of gratitude so genuine and so visible that God will be greatly magnified as the merciful giver of everything we have and are.

O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. (Psalm 34:3)

I will praise the name of God with a song. I will magnify him with thanksgiving. (69:30)

Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is in me, bless his holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all his benefits. (103:1, 2)

Psalm 95:2

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

Psalm 100:4

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!

Psalm 116:17

I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.

Psalm 147:7

Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre!

Communion in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox expressions is called the Holy Eucharist. That word 'eucharist' is interesting.

This Latin word comes from the Greek "eukaristos," which means "grateful" and is usually translated as "thanksgiving." It is built on the word for grace known as 'karis.' And this English word 'grace' is the root word for the term 'gratitude'. Gratitude has a very close relationship to grace. And that understanding can help us in our celebration of communion.

So let's try to define just what gratitude is in our experience. I have found it helpful to think of some things that might be thought of as gratitude, but really are not.

- Gratitude is more than saying, "Thank you," when someone gives you something. Gratitude is more than an action which we decide to do by an act of will power. You can say the words, "thank you," when there is not gratitude in your heart at all. If you give a ten year-old a necktie or a pair of socks for Christmas, he may dutifully say, "Thank you," but the spontaneous feeling of gratitude will probably not be there, like it would be if you gave him a new X-Box. Gratitude is a **happy feeling** not an act of will power.
- But gratitude is more than delighting in a gift. It is more than feeling happy that you got something you wanted. For example, if you give that ten year-old the electronic game, he might just rip open the package, say, "Wow," and walk away and start bragging how much better his game is than his neighbor's. He might not even give a thought to the kindness you did for him in giving him the game. He delights in getting the gift, but he is still an ungrateful child because his delight is not directed to you the giver. So gratitude is more than delighting in a gift. It is a feeling of happiness directed toward a person for giving you something good. Gratitude is a **happy feeling** you have **about a giver** because of his giving something good to you or doing something good for you.
- But one more qualification has to be made: generally we don't send our employer a thank you note every payday. This does not mean that we don't feel grateful that we have a job, and that we have the strength to earn money, and that our employer pays us fairly. What it means is that the **emotion of gratitude generally rises in direct proportion to how undeserved a gift is**. The "Grace" or unmerited favor that is displayed. Where work and pay are commensurate, we do not feel pay as an undeserved kindness, but as our due, and therefore the feeling of gratitude is not very intense toward our employer. He has not done us a favor; we have traded favors.

In other words, gratitude flourishes in the sphere of grace. And Grace is *karis* and gratitude is eukaristos because gratitude is a response to grace. Gratitude is the feeling of happiness you feel toward somebody who has shown you some undeserved kindness, that is, who has been gracious to you.

Let us enjoy communion in this light this morning with gratitude because of God's grace.