

THANK YOU, LORD for people

Colossians 1:3-12

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. NIV

CUE ____—You can just feel the love that St. Paul has for the Colossian people in these verses, can't you? And we can learn a lot about being thankful from this reading, can't we? Paul starts off by saying, **"We always thank God...for you"** and **"We pray for you."** Today is a day for us to really show how thankful we are to God for the people in our lives. That might mean going right up to someone you hold near and dear and saying, "I thank God for you!" and then telling that person why you are so thankful to God for him or her. That might mean being extra helpful to someone who is preparing your Thanksgiving feast this year. That might mean giving a big bear hug or a hearty handshake to someone who is very special to you. It might mean including the names of people you love in the prayer you say around the dinner table. However you wish to do it, show people in some way how grateful you are for their presence in your life.

Of course, the most important person in our life is Jesus Christ, our Savior. Let's not get so preoccupied with our Thanksgiving feast or watching the Lions and Packers or preparing for Black Friday shopping, that we forget to thank God that **"he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).** Your sins are paid for, you have a purpose to fulfill on this earth, and you have eternal life in heaven waiting for you because Jesus lived a perfect life you, died on the cross to pay for your sins, and rose from the dead to assure you that you are now right with God. Jesus is the most important person in your life. Thank God for his love, thank God for what he has done for you. And thank the person who first told you and taught you about the love of God for you in Jesus.

Today I ask you, "Who are your people, your 'peeps' if you will, the people who get you through your day, who help you see what God has done and is doing in your life, the people who point you to Jesus every day?" Take out your bulletin and on page that says, "Thank You, Lord for people," write the names of special people in your life you are thankful to God for, and make a promise to pray for those people sometime today. I'll give you a moment. . . . Now let's sing *Come, You Thankful People Come*.

THANK YOU, LORD for places

Genesis 28:10-19

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. NIV

CUE ____—In this reading, Jacob says of where he is, **"How awesome is this place!"** And why does he say this? Because, he says, **"Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it."** It was in this place in the dark of night where he stopped to sleep. Why was he in this place? Because he was running away in fear from his brother Esau, whom he had wronged. But what happened in this place? Jacob had a dream of angels ascending and descending on a ladder to and from heaven and he heard the Lord assure him that **"I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go."** Jacob awoke and built an altar in that place and called that place Bethel, which means House of God.

What we learn from this story is that the place itself may be not have been all that special to begin with. In fact, it originally had the rather unattractive name of Luz. But God made that place special by his presence and Jacob recognized that. Certainly God is with us here at church, where you are fed by Scripture, renewed by the words of forgiveness and absolution, nourished by the bread and wine—the body and blood of Jesus—in Holy Communion, and are free to praise our God through song. But God is also with you as he was with Jacob wherever you go. What can you do to bring that fact to light in every place you are? You don't have to build an altar in your office cubicle, but you can put a favorite Bible verse on a Post-It note and put it on the side of your computer. You can put a picture of Jesus on the wall next to your kitchen table. You can wear a cross necklace to a party. You can carry a little cross in your pocket like I do. Whatever it is, put little reminders of God's presence in your life in each and every place. And thank God every day for the places he has put you to praise his name and live for him.

Let's thank God especially this day for the blessing of his Son Jesus, called "Emmanuel," which means, "God with us," who came to this earth to move into our neighborhood and live with us and save us through his life, death, and resurrection. He is the foundation on which we build our lives in every place we are. So we sing the hymn together now, *Christ Is Our Cornerstone*.

THANK YOU, LORD for things

Matthew 6:25-33

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
NIV

CUE ____—We have a lot of “stuff” in our lives, don’t we? Our homes are filled with furniture and TVs and computers and I-Pods and Nooks and Kindles and so on and so on and so on. Our closets are crammed with clothes. Our cupboards are stacked with dishes and plates. Our pantries are stocked with food. On this Thanksgiving, we take a step back to say thank you to God for our many “things.”

But our reading for today gives us a caveat about thinking too much about things as well. Jesus tells us point-blank not to worry so much about material things like clothing or food. Thinking too much about material things can take our focus away from God and the things that really matter, like forgiveness, salvation, and heaven. The things of this earth are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us in heaven, Paul tells us. We need to keep our perspective clear and our priorities straight, remembering that the things of this earth will ultimately pass away, but the things of God will last forever.

So as we dine at our Thanksgiving meal surrounded by heaps of food and beautiful dishes and silverware, remember what these things all point to—that is, the banquet hall of heaven, where we will feast with all the saints in endless bliss. As we put on our finest clothes, remember that we will one day wear the robes of righteousness won for us by our Savior who died on the cross and rose to life again.

This Thanksgiving we do indeed thank God for the things of this earth, but we are called by God most of all to think of the things of his kingdom first and not let the things of this earth take center stage in our lives. When we put God’s things first, everything else on this earth will serve as a window into what God has in store for us. Let us thank God now for all the things he has given us by singing *Now Thank We All Our God*.

Prayer of the Church for Thanksgiving

M: Lord God, you have blessed your Church throughout the world and throughout time with resources necessary to spread your Gospel message to all the earth. We thank you for providing the people, places and things required to make the Church grow and flourish in faithfulness to you. Lord, in your mercy,

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Lord God, on this Thanksgiving Day, we thank you for the ways in which you have blessed our nation with a bountiful harvest and the freedom to worship you without fear. We pray you would continue to guide the people in government that our nation would make wise decisions that improve the lives of all its citizens. Lord, in your mercy,

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Lord God, we thank you for this place we call our church. Help us as a congregation to love and support one another in our mission for you and to preserve this place as a beacon of hope and care for our community. Lord, in your mercy,

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Lord God, we pray on this Thanksgiving Day for the homeless, the hungry and the poor who do not have the basic things that we so easily take for granted. Help us to find ways to provide for all those in need during this special time of year. Lord, in your mercy,

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Lord God, for all the ways you bless us in body, mind and spirit with people, places and things, we give you all our praise. In your gracious name we pray the prayer you taught us: