

Date: November 12, 2023

Texts: Psalm 68. 32-35 / i Thessalonians 1. 2-10

Title: "Response"

## Intro -

re: the power... impact of... importance of...

"thank you"

(cf. - not a bad time of year to consider that...)

cf. - per Moms the world over (at least, those of a certain generation)

- did you remember to say thank you...?

did you write a thank you note...?

relate - not just a matter of politeness...

apparently (per a recent 10-year study of 200,000 managers  
and employees) -

- saying "thank you" in the business world results in bigger profits.

When people are thanked for what they do, they are more motivated,  
and often, their productivity improves.

there is even an article in which the author provides a list of 28

expressions of gratitude for those leaders who are too challenged to  
come up with their own -- including such simple phrases as

"I'm truly grateful," "Your contribution is important" and

"You make my job so much easier."

which - just because some folks are coming up with a strategy for it...

does not take away from the truth that -

gratitude is a difference-maker...

cf. - there was a guy...

went through a very rough patch in his life... and -

came to the conclusion he needed to learn... to express...

gratitude

he embarked on a "thank you" note writing campaign...

and wrote a book about it:

*365 Thank Yous: The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life*

interestingly, when the year was up, he stopped writing the notes briefly,  
but said, "That didn't work out for me."

He resumed the practice and now continues to write a note of thanks a day.

relate per Paul - in writing to the Thessalonians - gives expression to  
great gratitude -

thankfulness for a faith grounded in salvation...

that gets translated into how they live their lives

kind of like...

what we come to in the Brief Statement of Faith:

*In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,*

*we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks*

*and to live holy and joyful lives,*

*even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,*

*praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"*

cf. -how might we show the gratitude we feel...?

## **I) Serve**

I think it begins in service -

service that has an unshakable reason...

and unchanging object...

i.e. - we strive to serve Christ

(not our own egos... not our need for recognition...

not even to improve the bottom line...)

we keep our eyes set firmly on Christ as the one we serve...

as the object of our labors

and...

we do this daily -

we do this as a part of our daily tasks...

not just on Sundays... or days when the sun is shining...  
or days after we got a good night's rest -  
rather - it is an inseparable part of who we are

cf. - Nicolas Herman was born into humble circumstances around 1614,  
in Lorraine, in eastern France... he enlisted in the army during the  
Thirty Years' War because he had no other way to earn a living.  
After his discharge he entered a Carmelite priory in Paris, and  
adopted the name, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection.  
He spent the rest of his life within the walls of the Priory,  
cooking in the kitchen and working as a repairer of sandals.  
Yet, Brother Lawrence communicated such an attitude of inner peace  
that others flocked to him, seeking to learn the secrets of the spiritual life.  
After his death, friends compiled a collection of his sayings into the  
spiritual classic, *The Practice of the Presence of God*,  
a book beloved by Catholics and Protestants alike.

Brother Lawrence's rule of life was simple:  
"I began to live as if there were no one save God and me in the world."  
This method he took into the Priory kitchen, where, amidst the  
"common business" of cooking, he attuned himself to God's presence:  
"Nor is it needful that we should have great things to do. ...  
We can do little things for God; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan  
for love of him..."  
[... and - when that is done, I look for where else I might enjoy  
the presence of God in the mundane tasks of daily living...]  
- what comes into our lives - on a daily basis - through which we might show  
our gratitude to God...?

## II) Live

cf. - per the deep connexion here with living a holy life...  
living a joyful life...  
as the author of the "365 Thank you's" book discovered -

“gratitude became his way back to success and harmony...”

gratitude formed the foundation for a life that touched the holy...

and that was infused with joy

cf. - per Henri Nouwen in “Bread for the Journey” -

"To be a witness for God is to be a living sign of God's presence in the world.

What we live is more important than what we say, because the right way  
of living always leads to the right way of speaking.

When we forgive our neighbors from our hearts,

our hearts will speak forgiving words.

When we are grateful, we will speak grateful words, and

when we are hopeful and joyful, we will speak hopeful and joyful words.”

- In gratitude to God, we are empowered by the Spirit to do just this...

~ are we...?

cf. - it's easy to take cheap shots at ourselves as staid... “sit quietly” Presbys,

but -

those shots do ring true

by way of contrast, per Brian McLaren:

“the scandalous truth -- known by mystics throughout history and  
affirmed in the pages of our sacred texts is that when we connect with God,  
it is as if we are plugging our souls into a pure current of high-voltage joy...

God is a joyful being and to enter or awaken to God's presence is  
to enjoy a bracing jolt of invigorating delight...

Yes, there is indeed a place for quiet reverence, the dignity of robes and the  
noble tranquility of marble columns and pipe organs.

But my suspicion is that among the barefoot poor, we learn something that the  
well-heeled seldom discover: God is joyful, and God's joy is contagious.

When we tap into the joy of the Lord, when we step into the pure joy that burns  
like a billion galaxies in the heart of God, we'll soon find ourselves

shouting, dancing, singing, leaping, clapping, swaying, laughing  
and otherwise jubilating and celebrating.”

cf. - I'm not saying we have to dance, and leap, and shout...

but - as per Nouwen - are we giving expression to the joy that is ours?

### III) Watch

... a joy that is ours because we know that our tomorrow  
is given shape and form

by the sure and certain promises of God

which raises the question:

what do we mean when we say that “we watch for God’s new heaven  
and new earth, praying, “Come, Lord Jesus!”?

listen to this, from N. T. Wright -

“I use, as a “secular” example, the lifetime forming of habits exemplified by  
Chesley Sullenberger III, the pilot who ... brought the [US Airways plane]  
down safely in the Hudson River after a flock of geese got into the  
engines after take-off from La Guardia.

All his instincts had been trained so that when the moment came -

he didn’t have to stop to think what to do; it just “came naturally.” ...

in gratitude to God...

what come naturally from our lives...?

(Wright continues...) -

“When you learn a language, your brain literally changes:

new connections are made, new possibilities emerge, new habits of  
mind, tongue, and even sometimes body language emerge  
and are formed.

The result is not, though, that you can speak it for the fun of it,

but that you can communicate with people in that language,

and perhaps even be able to go and live in the country where  
that language is spoken, and feel at home there. ...

The point is that in the new heavens and new earth

there is an entire way of life awaiting us...

...and we have the chance to learn, here and now,  
the character-skills we shall need for that new way of life —  
particularly the great three which Paul says will “abide” into God’s future,  
namely faith, hope and especially love.”

relate re: a piece of art on exhibit not too long ago in the Chicago  
Museum of Contemporary Art - more commentary than art, but...  
the artist took a small church bulletin board, and - in a manner familiar to  
clergy across the land, she spelled out life at one local congregation  
in simple white letters against a stark black background.

~ EVENINGS AT 7 IN THE PARISH HALL ~

Mon. Alcoholics Anonymous

Tues. Abused Spouses

Wed. Eating Disorders

Thur. Say No To Drugs

Fri. Teen Suicide Watch

Sat. Soup Kitchen

Sunday Sermon 9 a.m. - “America's Joyous Future”

so... did visitors see "America's Joyous Future" as an indictment of churches  
that preach pie in the sky in their worship services

while remaining oblivious to the real hurts and needs of people?

Or did they see it as a sign that our congregations are  
deeply immersed in human suffering...?

... that we are giving expression to the gratitude we feel...

that we are embracing the empowerment of the Spirit...

that we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks...

that we find our joy in this...

that we look for the kingdom of God in everything, and -

that we see it as our calling to participate in the work

that will bring pleasure to our God

Come, Lord Jesus! (and rejoice in the faithfulness of your people...)