

Bellevue Community News – November 2022

“A Prayer of Thanksgiving”

“Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor – and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness . . .” These are the first words of the proclamation made by President George Washington on October 3, 1789 from New York City designating Thursday, November 26, 1789 as a national day of thanksgiving. Subsequent Presidents and Congresses of the United States continued the precedent set by Washington, and since 1942, Thanksgiving as a national holiday has been observed on the fourth Thursday of November.

Washington’s proclamation drew heavily upon what is written in the Bible about giving thanks. Indeed, the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, has much to say about who is to give thanks, when to give thanks, how to give thanks, and why to give thanks. But interestingly, there is a particular incident recorded in the Bible when giving thanks is not recommended.

In telling the story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, Luke, the writer of the third gospel likes to tell the story in two’s for the purpose of comparison and contrast. For example, in Luke we read of two women expecting a baby, two old saints waiting for the Messiah, two sisters welcoming Jesus into their home. In particular, Luke likes to compare and contrast how two people respond to God. A good illustration showing how people respond to God can be found in what is known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son: *“There was a man who had two sons . . .”* (Luke 15:11).

In Luke 18:9-14 we read these words: *“[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ‘Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Here are two different prayers, different not only because they are prayed by two different men. Rather, they are fundamentally different at their core; thus, one prayer God hates, and the other prayer God loves. The prayer of thanksgiving made by the Pharisee was evaluated by Jesus and condemned. It is a prayer of thanksgiving that God hates. The plea for mercy made by the tax collector was evaluated by Jesus and commended. A Christian is, among other things, someone who (to borrow a title from Motown’s The Temptations) *“Ain’t Too Proud to Beg”* for God’s mercy. A prayer of thanksgiving that God loves is one in which God is recognized as the giver of something that is not deserved – His mercy, His grace, His favor. Christians always have two essential needs: a humble realization and repentance of our sin and a grateful recognition and receiving of God’s forgiveness in Christ.

Thanksgiving Day is the opportunity for the people of our nation to slow down and remember to give thanks for the blessings of *“Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”* (Declaration of Independence) along with the opportunity and challenge before us *“to form a more perfect union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity”* (Constitution). And for those people who are able to acknowledge *“the providence of Almighty God”*, Thanksgiving Day provides a good opportunity to ask this question: *“For what am I thankful?”* The answers will be revealing and may even become life-changing.

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