

Wading River Congregational Church

SERMONS IN PRINT

PETER J. VIBERT, PASTOR

NOVEMBER 25, 2009

THANKSGIVING EVE



For more sermons go to www.wrconchurch.org

2 Cor 9:10-15 *"Gratitude & Generosity"*

What you should really do, said Jesus, is *"love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength,"* and *"love your neighbor as yourself."* I have suggested before that one way to translate these most fundamental commands is to say we should be *grateful* and *generous*: grateful to God for his goodness to us, and generous to other people, showing the same graciousness God has shown us.

1) *Grateful*

Gratitude should be easy this week - the iconic American holiday of Thanksgiving, which draws us all to gratitude for a day, or at least for a few moments! What will we be grateful for tomorrow? Certainly the basics: family and friends and food; living in a place like Long Island in the 21st C.; enjoying a higher standard of living, more opportunity, better health, more jobs, more recreation, bigger homes, better cars, than most people in the history of the world have dreamt of! All this we should be thankful for. But there's a danger here, isn't there? - that we turn God into a giant Santa, an Amazon.com, a WalMart, who provides all our needs; and when that provision system falls short, we complain, and grumble at God.

So there are other things we should be grateful to God for. The great old hymn *"O Worship The King"* that we sang tonight ends with thanks to God for his mercies as our

Maker, Defender, Redeemer and Friend. We should thank him for those things, and not just for giving us gifts!

He is our *Maker*. Our lives come from him and return to him. Every day of living is a gift, and one that becomes most precious to us when we see it threatened. At times we realize just how fragile life is, especially near its beginning and ending, and to see our loved ones in those moments brings home to us just what a privilege it is to be alive and healthy and able to enjoy one more day. Tomorrow is not guaranteed to us; we live one moment at a time, and our times are in God's hands.

He is our *Defender*. We have no idea how tirelessly the Father of us all has worked to bring us to this place and time. He has protected us from a million disasters, moved us to resist a thousand temptations, guided our steps through all the strange paths we have followed to this moment. Which of us planned that we would be living here, now, doing what we are doing? How many forks in the road, how many wrong turns, how many ditches we have been in, have somehow been woven together by God to bring us to this moment? How astonishing is his Providence, his care over our lives, his plan for us! Should we not be grateful to our Defender?

He is our *Redeemer*. Ever since our world first started to go wrong, ever since evil increased in all cultures and with every development

of so-called "civilization," he has been at work to reverse the slide towards ruin. He has called a people to himself to be lights to the world and examples of holiness and reconciliation. Finally that came into focus in Jesus, our Redeemer, who loved us enough to die for us. So we are freed from the tyranny of sin and reconciled to our Father. Are we grateful that sin is forgiven, that guilt can be lifted from our shoulders, that we can - even now - be at peace with God?

He is our *Friend*. God does not leave us as orphans in a dangerous world; he sends us his Spirit, and makes us part of his People, and we are never alone. No matter how often or how deeply we sometimes feel that way, he is with us on our path, uphill and down, now and forever. He is as near as answered prayer, as close as the hug of a friend. He teaches us from his Word, uplifts our spirits through worship, guides our steps by opening and closing doors, and whispers his will in our ears. Should we not be grateful to the Friend who walks unseen beside us every day, and carries us when the going is rough?

2) *Generous*

But there's the other "shoe to drop" in faithful living, isn't there? Grateful to God, *generous* to other people. How do we do that?

Be generous with our *wealth*. Give to help those who have much less than we do. Give to support charities and missions that make life better for other people, here and around the world. Adopt a child for \$35 dollars a month - peanuts to most of us, life and death to a child in parts of Africa and Asia and South America. Give our loose change to The Mission of Small Things and help them raise another \$5000 as they have in the past few years. Give to our churches to maintain and extend ministries to people in spiritual, emotional and physical need.

Be generous with our *time and our talents*. In some ways it's so much easier to write a check than to actually *do* something! We are all too busy, but if we have no time for anyone beyond, for example, our families, then we are as miserly as if we spent our money only on ourselves. We have to make time for other people, if we claim to be living as Christians. That might mean working at a soup kitchen or food bank, or it might mean calling a lonely senior to see if they are ok. It might mean sending someone a card, or inviting them over. It might mean visiting an old friend who is now in a nursing home, a neighbor in the hospital. It might mean volunteering at a Thrift Store, or chaperoning youth activities, or raking leaves around the neighborhood, or baking for other people. We ought to be as generous with our time as with our money, because for most of us, time is now our most precious possession!

We should be generous to other people with our *attitudes, our attention, our affection*. It's no good being around someone and never speaking to them, being married to someone but never expressing love or appreciation, having children but leaving them to fend for themselves. We shouldn't do everything for other people, but somehow we ought to communicate our interest, our attention, our affection. We ought not to hold grudges or refuse to forgive or forget, but treat one another graciously.

Grateful to God, generous to others. And do you see how the cycle is completed? *Generosity causes people to thank God* (2 Cor 9) and draws them into relationship with him. So thank God for all he is and all he does, and then be gracious to each other - especially at Thanksgiving!

Let us pray...