

“NO TIME TO BE AN INGRATE,” A Sermon delivered by the Reverend Dr. Geoffrey G. Drutchas, St. Paul United Church of Christ, Taylor, November 24, 2021

Thanksgiving—it’s supposed to be a time of thanks. Except this Thanksgiving is not like so many other cherished Thanksgivings of years past that we may almost nostalgically remember. You know what’s going on. Our nation’s political life is in disarray. The COVID pandemic still rages nationally. Sad to say, Michigan is the Number One hotspot. Meanwhile, because of labor and supply shortages, inflation is climbing and nipping at pocketbooks.

All this is enough to give anyone a case of anxiety. With a mix of both frustration and despair in our voices, we may ask: *Are America’s best years behind her? Just what do we have to be thankful for?* Yet it’s almost ironic that we should ask such questions. Because when times were better and there was no pandemic besetting us, a lot of folks didn’t have time for thanks then either. They were too busy getting on with life. Blessings were taken for granted. Now, when folks have more time to spend at home, partaking of all the moments of solitude that go with it, a lot of us are too resentful to be thankful. Are we never happy? At what point do we take an honest look at ourselves in the mirror and recognize that a bigger problem than all the ups-and-downs of life today is our attitude and outlook? Although it may sound harsh, we have an ingrate problem. What I really mean to say that in good times and bad too many of us are ingrates.

What is an ingrate? Simply defined, an ingrate is someone who has no gratitude. Like Scrooge from Charles Dickens’ famous *Christmas Carol* story, an ingrate is full of “Bah, humbug!” What’s sad is that in their ingratitude, ingrates inevitably compound their woe. When we give oxygen and vent to woes, disgruntlement and unhappiness are prone to spiral. Negativity breeds more negativity. Anticipating the worst about our circumstances becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yes, we can get so stuck on the down side of things that we miss out on whatever positive might come our way. Ingratitude and negativity blind us from fresh opportunity and blessing that our ever-redemptive God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, is sending our way.

In his Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul shares wisdom that we should never forget, particularly in those moments when troubles try us and we’re unhappy about life because things aren’t going as we think they should. “In all things,” Paul counsels us, “God works for the good for those who love him, according to his purposes.” (*Romans 8:28*) Obviously, this is no promise of a perfect world. Or a personal life free of troubles. But Paul puts us on notice that God can and does work through whatever adversity besets us so long as our own lives are aligned with his divine purposes. In fact, in our

greatest times of need, God continues to provide, protect, strengthen, and heal. God also, if we are ready to listen, guides us in the way of wisdom, that enables us to discover fresh purpose and meaning for our lives.

For his own part the Apostle Paul believes that when we allow negativity and doubt to flourish and overtake us, we show a deficient faith. Any heavy duty or chronic negativity is very definitely symptomatic of a lack of trust in God. I think Paul knows that he's talking about. Don't you?

Now, being faithful doesn't mean that we become cock-eyed optimists, who don't see anything amiss and always assume everything will turn out fine whatever we do. That's being naïve. Very differently, Paul's nuanced assurance to us is that the good will prevail *if and when* we are actually working with God to fulfill his purposes for our lives—not just doing what we will, what we want.

Yes, faithfulness, which is trust, and hope, which is something rather different than optimism, truly do go together. And a resolve on our part to be thankful can help us be more faithful and hopeful.

When we are thankful, in other words, when we conscientiously count our blessings made possible by God, we come to realize that we have more going for us than we previously appreciated, no matter may also be going wrong in our lives. We are swept by the feeling that, whatever is happening in the world at large and even our own lives for the moment, God is good and life overall isn't so bad.

This weekend of national holiday, we are all well-served to pause, to take time out from all we are doing as we gather with family or hit the road in travel, to count our blessings. Let's each make this a Thanksgiving holiday when we do not take our God-given blessings for granted.

I have my own checklist of blessings that you may also want to consider and contemplate. The blessing of family. The blessing of friends. The blessing of health, even if it is sometimes a little worn around the edges. The blessing of a church community that gives us a sense of belonging and provides us with the company of caring people. And not ever to be overlooked, the blessing of a God, who revealed through the love of Jesus Christ, never quits on us—or anyone who puts their trust in him.

Congregation, when we name and count our blessings, we rediscover time and again that our glass isn't half-empty or merely half-full. But, instead, brim-full and running over.

As I count blessings with gratitude, there are things I still wish and hope for. The defeat of COVID, for instance. And the end of all the suspicion and political strife that beset America's public life today. Our world certainly be a better place if there were more cooperation all around so that the needs of the homeless, hungry, and persecuted whom Jesus cared so much about are answered with compassion and justice. A return to faith and the Christians way of life that Jesus and the apostles taught is certainly on the list of things I pray for. Yet the blessings already in plain sight offer all the encouragement and sustenance needed for a good life as we await the greater transformation and renewal that God will one day usher in.

Tonight in our gospel lesson from Matthew we hear Jesus' instructions to his own apostles to take their leave of any town and household that rudely receives them as ambassadors of the Good News. What's more, as they depart, Jesus has another recommendation. Shake the dust of that place from your sandals. (*Mark 6:9-13; Matthew 10:12-14*) In other words, don't take it with you. Counseling precaution, Jesus is talking both literally and figuratively. The dust represents the toxicity and negativity which his apostles are invariably destined to encounter. However, Jesus is saying, don't carry other people's toxicity and negativity away with you and thereby contaminate the next place you visit or stay. This wise and precious gospel passage underscores how careful all of us as Christians need to be to ensure that the bad attitudes and outlook of others don't spoil our own. And certainly, the last thing we should ever want to do is to poison the greeting of the next people we meet and greet.

In the face of whatever negativity confronts or tempts us, let's do some sandal-shaking of our own. And let's keep a faithful frame of mind that is hopeful and truly grounded in gratitude for what God has already bestowed and continues to share with us. As we celebrate this Thanksgiving, may we each take time—all the time we need—to count our blessings and to give true thanks for all of them that we might abide as the sincerely, positive-minded people that our faith in Jesus Christ calls us to be. **Amen.**