

## **“Generosity and Thanksgiving”**

November 20, 2016

*Thanksgiving and Thanks-living” series*

It was just one month ago that we handed out envelopes with a special Kingdom Assignment. 200 envelopes were given out with the hope that we would participate in building God’s Kingdom in significant ways. We wanted to do something together, show what generosity looks like, and show how we can use our gifts in unique ways.

And, praise God, what a month! I’m so grateful for our prayerful engagement in this assignment. It’s difficult to even imagine how much more has been given than what was in the envelopes. I can only imagine the return because most of us at least doubled what we had - and much more. From person-to-person contact to our Muskegon-area to national and international mission organizations, we’ve participated in Kingdom-building in a powerful way!

We can be excited about it, but even more, I’m excited for the witness of it. This is about generosity and thanksgiving and how faith in God who is generous plays into our everyday lives.

How do generosity and thanksgiving connect? We don’t have to wait for a season to be thankful. We don’t have to wait for Thanksgiving or the holiday season to be generous. The power of new life and resurrection are a part of who we are every day as we walk with Jesus.

Paul’s word to us to “rejoice in the Lord” is important. He spoke to me in the midst of our world. I see and hear a lot of negative right now, and much of it comes from uncertainty, fear, and anger. It’s not unfounded. Numbers say that our country is divided; some would say polarized in the midst of this election cycle.

The current atmosphere can make it difficult to get beyond the cynicism and negativity. Even in the church we struggle to shift focus from the cynical and negative, but Paul says, “rejoice in the Lord.” I needed to hear those words. And I want you to know that this exercise has helped me. Seeing all of the ways that we have responded with generous hearts has helped me to remember who I am in Christ and who we are as the Body of Christ in the world.

Russian writer Anton Chekov is credited with saying, “Any idiot can face a crisis; it’s this day-to-day living that wears you out.” I take him to mean that it’s easy for us to become run-down and hopeless in the midst of what we face every day. For some of us today, it’s a health concern or grief, a broken relationship, ongoing struggles, or the uncertainty about what’s ahead for our country and our world. Our response as people

who seek to follow Jesus is important - for us and for the people we encounter every day. How do we live faithfully in this?

I was caught by Paul's call to be think on - focus on - meditate on - whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. I don't think he means to avoid what's tough for us. I don't think Paul calls us to be unrealistic. It doesn't mean that ignore what's going on. I'm troubled by the hatred and violence after this election, and we must stand against hate.

But perhaps Paul can speak to us right now in the midst of all that we see, hear, and experience - and call us to believe that whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy is worth thinking about! It's worth focusing on! It's worth taking time to celebrate, give thanks, and respond to with glad and generous hearts.

Here's something else I was reminded of: generosity really does matter. It changes us and makes us more thankful. And I think the reverse is true, too. Thankfulness changes us and makes us more generous.

We could get into a "chicken and egg" discussion about it, but it's all rooted in God's love for us. That's where it starts. Generosity flows from the heart – first from God's heart to us and then from our hearts to the world. I still remember words from a commercial I heard a few years ago: Every act of care we give helps the people we love become the people who love.

Paul talks to a community of faith at a time when there's persecution and uncertainty. And his word to the people in Philippi is to be anxious in nothing, prayerful for everything, and thankful in anything. Perhaps it's a good word for us - to remember that we're called to live by faith (not anxiety or fear even when those feelings are strong) - and to let that faith show in word and deed to the glory of God.

We're called to pray fervently. It's our most powerful tool. And we're called to be thankful. Paul says to rejoice - not in anything else or anyone else except for the Lord. And Paul lifts up the promise of peace that is ours in Christ.

Perhaps you've heard the starfish story before, but I hope you'll hear today as we've talked about making a difference.

READ STARFISH STORY from

<http://www.esc16.net/users/0020/FACES/Starfish%20Story.pdf>

Friends, we might think that these acts are small, but we can trust that each of them makes a difference in the world and all to the glory of God.

Thanks be to God! Amen.