

Thank You Notes Philippians 4:4-7

Today, we enter into the season of Thanksgiving with this Thank Offering Service, the Thanksgiving Eve service here in our sanctuary, and the Thanksgiving holiday coming up in a few days. It's always good to have a little encouragement from the pulpit about being thankful, just a reminder to us all that being thankful is truly a foundational element to being a Christian – we are thankful to God for our blessings. Today, to help us in this endeavor, I have chosen a little nugget of wisdom about being thankful from the apostle Paul, found in Philippians 4:4-7. Let's listen now for the word of the Lord.

Read Philippians 4:4-7. Pray.

Most Friday nights when I don't have to get up early Saturday morning, I like to stay up and watch The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon. It is reminiscent of the fact that I spent many a night as a girl staying up to watch The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson with my dad, and to be honest, it's still difficult for me to watch anyone other than Johnny Carson doing this show (although I know that Jay Leno did it for many years as well). Every Friday night, Jimmy Fallon does a little segment he calls "Thank You Notes" that I look forward to and it really makes us chuckle.

In this time, Jimmy sits at his desk and he tells the audience that he is running behind on some of his daily tasks like returning phone calls, answering emails and writing thank you notes, so he asks the audience if they wouldn't mind if he writes a few on the air. He gets a little background music and pulls out his notes and he begins.

Of course, each thank you note that Jimmy Fallon writes is funny, but as I have watched him week after week, and looked at him through my theological lens, I have grown to appreciate the unique nature of his letters. I have grown to realize that there is actually something we can take away from this segment and use in our lives as Christians. He takes something completely ordinary, something often overlooked, or something people may even find absurd, and he finds a way to give thanks for it. And he does this every week. (943 show video of Jimmy Fallon)

For instance, in the last few weeks, he has given thanks for the pieces of celery that always accompany chicken wings when you order them at a restaurant, because the celery helps him to think he is eating something healthy. He says thank you to Daylight Savings Time for kicking off the one-half of the year when his clocks are actually correct. And one of my favorites is his Thank You Note to all bowling balls for having the three holes in them that allow him to pick up and control the ball as he tosses it down the bowling lane. Otherwise, he would just be picking up a heavy ball and heaving it indiscriminately toward the pins. It's a little light-hearted look at giving thanks.

In our scripture passage for today, the apostle Paul also tells us a little secret about being thankful. "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication WITH THANKSGIVING let your requests be made known to God. And the PEACE of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Paul is saying that, if we bring our thankfulness to God with regularity, we will experience peace in our minds and in our hearts. Being thankful brings peace; being mindful of our blessings brings peace; acknowledging that everything comes from God, offers us a peace that nothing else can bring. That's pretty powerful stuff – when we are in a constant state of thankfulness, our hearts and our minds will be at peace. So says the apostle Paul.

Putting these two ideas about thankfulness together, a secular one and a religious one, creates a powerful and useful scenario for us as Christians. If you follow both Jimmy Fallon and Paul the apostle, you get a three step process of thankfulness.

First, as Jimmy Fallon shows us, we need to be thankful for the little things in life, the holes in the bowling ball. When we gather around our thanksgiving tables this Thursday, we will be thankful for our family around us, the food on the table and the roof over our heads. Of course, we are. We are not hard hearted individuals, we are thankful people. **But this year, I challenge you to think of things for which to be thankful that you have never thought of before.** Think of things that are small, unnoticed and obscure and be thankful.

Let's be thankful not just for our food, which is a very general term, but how about being thankful that we get to choose what food we will eat – what we like

and what we don't like. If we don't like it we don't eat it. We get to choose whether to have chicken or pork or steak to sustain us. We get to choose whether to be vegan or vegetarian or meat-loving. We get to decide whether or not to go out to a restaurant to eat or cook something at home. We get salt or pepper to put on our food if we think it needs some and we get to put sugar in our coffee if it tastes a little bitter to us. Let's be thankful, not just for food, but for the little things about our food that are all gifts from God.

Let's be thankful not just for our homes, whether home is an apartment, a single room or a whole house, but let's be thankful that we can beautify our homes with decorations and pictures of our loved ones and objects that are dear to us. Let's be thankful that we can turn up the heat in our homes if we are chilly or start the air conditioning if we are too toasty. Let's be thankful for the clean water that comes out of our spigot in the kitchen and bath and the lights that come on at the flick of a switch. Home is too general of a term to be thankful for, so let's be thankful for all of little things that make our homes livable and comfortable, for they are all gifts from God.

And then step two in this process of thankfulness would be, according to Jimmy Fallon, getting out our Thank You Notes and writing them to God. You know, writing thank you notes is a lost art, it really is. A text will not suffice. But a well placed thank you note can truly brighten someone's day, make them feel appreciated and spur them on to even greater things. And so it is with God. This season of Thanksgiving, get out your thank you notes and write them to God, thanking him for all he has given to you, even the small things, the silly things, that all of us overlook in our busy lives.

How do we write a thank you note to God? The apostle Paul mentions the most obvious way of thanking God, which is through thankful prayer: "In everything by prayer and supplication WITH THANKSGIVING let your requests be made known to God," says Paul. Our prayers should start and end with thanksgiving, even if it is just thanking God for the new day. I begin every prayer that I ever say, whether it's in a worship service or quietly in my, with a moment of thankfulness. It really sets the tone for who God is and who we are in the prayer. So, prayer is a way to do your thank you notes to God.

But I would suggest maybe taking this to a new level and truly writing a thank you note to God. You could do this by journaling your thankfulness, writing down the things you are thankful for. And then, on a really bad day, when you think you have little to be thankful for, you can open up your journal and read what you wrote at a better time in your life, and continue to give thanks. A few weeks ago, our pre-school director Camille Braun gave all of the staff members here at the church a little thank you journal filled with blank sheets of paper. She advised us to begin writing down our thankfulness to fully appreciate all that we have. I've been trying to do this and I advise you to do the same. Get a little book and each day, write down something different to be thankful for. Then, when you do go through troubles, as we all do from time to time, you can open up your journal and remind yourself of how much God loves you. The little book can be your Thank You Notes to God. He'll know what's in there and he knows what is in your heart.

Finally, the last step in this process of thankfulness comes exclusively from the apostle Paul, not Jimmy Fallon, and it is this: Paul says, "And the PEACE of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Peace. Peace comes from thankfulness. Peace comes from having a thankful heart. Peace comes from writing our thank you notes to God. It's that simple and yet it's that powerful. If you're looking for peace in your life (and who isn't), focus on all of the ways that God has blessed you this past year. If you're looking for peace in your life, write out all of the ways that God cares for you and provides for you. If you're looking for peace, be thankful for the little things that make your life wonderful and you will realize that God is there with you each and every day. God nurtures and provides for you. A thankful heart is a peaceful heart. It's true.

Next week, on the first Sunday of advent, we will be ushering in the season of peace. We will be joining together to wait for the arrival of the Prince of Peace. We will be singing about peace on earth and good will to men. And while we wait together, our hearts can be at peace if we remain thankful to God for all of his many blessings. Thanks be to God. Amen.