

*“Hit Songs, B.C.”-- Summer Sermon Series*  
Founders' Chapel  
**“Thanksgiving is Not Just a Holiday”**  
by Rev. James C. Ramsey

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Texts: Psalm 30  
Colossians 4:2

Preached: 9/1/19

[IMAGE – hit song]

Each Sunday this summer we have celebrated a different hit song – but they haven't exactly been contemporary, you haven't heard about any songs by Post Malone, Ariana Grande, Khalid, Ed Sheeran, or Billie Eilish... But neither have the songs been classic, no songs by the Beatles, the Doors, Led Zeppelin, Johnny Cash, the Doobie Brothers or even Creedence Clearwater Revival!

[IMAGE – Summer in the Psalms]

The songs we've been talking about haven't even been A.D., but rather all B.C. I have been, of course, talking about the hit songs of Ancient Israel's worship – that is The Psalms...the book in the middle of your Bible that comprises 150 selections of the church's original songbook!

[IMAGE – Bible Page]

The Psalms have much to teach us – how to pray, the right frame of mind for worship, what to do when you are frustrated or angry, an understanding of what it means to be a member of God's flock. This morning I conclude the series, even though there are many psalms we did not cover.

[IMAGE – Psalm Title Slide]

Today we highlight Psalm 30, an intentional choice to wrap up the series because it has been called by biblical scholars “the quintessential Thanksgiving psalm.” But the theme of thanksgiving ripples through many psalms, and, indeed, through the entire scriptures, Old Testament and New.

[IMAGE – top bible verses]

For example, just in the Psalms: Psalm 50 echoes direction from God's own lips, saying, “Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me.” Psalm 69 says, “I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.” While Psalm 92 reflects, “It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High.” Psalm 100 instructs those who would worship God, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.” And Psalm 107 begins memorably, “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.”

[IMAGE – Colossians 4:2]

The Apostle Paul wrote letters to the churches he helped found instructing them in many things, not least of which, that they should abound in thanksgiving. We see it in his Letter to the Colossians, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.”

[IMAGE – Philippians 4-6]

And also in his correspondence with the Philippians, “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

[IMAGE – Ephesians 5-4]

Or in his rebuke of the Ephesians, where he insists, “Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving.”

[IMAGE – John of Patmos]

John, writing in his Revelation, shares his vision of the angels singing around the throne of God: their words ring out... “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

[IMAGE – choir of angels]

A prominent Bible teacher asked, “If the angels spend eternity giving God the glory, then what's keeping us from doing the same, in the present time?”

So what about you? What's your gratitude quotient? How often do you give thanks, say thanks, recount your blessings, marvel at the gifts God has given?

[IMAGE – happy patient]

You know there are a legion of legitimate studies done in the last twenty years that show people with deep faith -- who attend church, read the Bible and pray – are happier and healthier than those without faith. Commenting on such studies, one expert pointed out: “The most important component of happiness, by far — there isn't a close second — is gratitude...Nothing instills gratitude as much as religion and prayer done correctly. Prayer is a major vehicle to gratitude. Not request prayer, grateful prayer: [as in] ‘Thank you, God.’”

[IMAGE – restful sleep]

Another expert suggests that the key to rest...a good night's sleep...is thankfulness. Many people struggle with wakefulness at night...when the mind starts running and we tend to think about worrisome things, which only makes things worse. One technique is to purposely shift our thought processes away from scarcity to abundance. In the night we can get focused on and anxious about what we don't have: a scarcity mentality that makes us feel deficient in health, in wealth, in relationships, or whatever stress made us wake up in the first place. Intentionally counting our blessings makes a world of difference!

[IMAGE – Psalm30-5]

Psalm 30 shows the psalmist shifting his thoughts away from his troubles and toward God's abundance. There is surely a lament or complaint behind this psalm. The psalmist remembers it, remembers being in a place of dread...of desperation – but his prayers for rescue and healing were answered. The LORD turned his mourning into dancing, switched out his clothes of grief for a new outfit of joy. And his soul will not be silent – his pledge is to give thanks to God forever!

[IMAGE – michaels]

You will notice soon, if you haven't already, that stores are beginning to put out their Thanksgiving displays. Walk into Michaels, now, and everywhere you look

[IMAGE – michaels display]

will be plaques to “give thanks” or be “thankful” and an endless supply of “Happy Thanksgiving” signs. It's only September 1<sup>st</sup>. Thanksgiving is nearly 3 months away. But perhaps it helps make my point. Thanksgiving is not just a holiday. For us, people of God, it is to be our way of life.

[IMAGE – be real]

That doesn't mean we have to be fake about it, sappy or overly sentimental. It doesn't mean we ignore what's really going on in our life or the world. It doesn't mean forgetting the frustration of our politics or ignoring the injustices that we have to oppose, with our voices and our actions and our vote. Thanksgiving can be a way of protest against those things. Thanksgiving reminds us of the goodness and providence of God, sometimes in spite of crappy days and rotten situations and hurtful comments and complicated relationships.

[IMAGE – lifted hands thank you]

What has God done for you? How has God blessed us? In what way have you been rescued, saved, healed, restored? Where is there joy in your life? Name it, list it, claim it, remember it, pray it, celebrate it! That's Thanksgiving – it's good for your faith, good for your health, good for your rest, good for your soul.

[IMAGE – bread and cup]

The books of the New Testament were originally written and edited in Greek. Do you know the Greek word for “thanksgiving?” It is eucharistia – from which we get our word Eucharist – one of the common terms for communion. In a minute we will partake of communion...the eucharist...the Thanksgiving! The prayer that Pastor Jo and I will read – the prayer we use every time we do communion is called the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving – an ancient prayer that has been said around communion since the very earliest days of the church.

[IMAGE – Last Supper]

Before Jesus left his apostles, he gave them bread and wine in memory of what he would soon do for them. In this way he could stay in their presence...in our presence, until all things are made new. Eucharist...thanksgiving, offers a way of accepting life in which the past and the future are brought together in the present moment and God is there.

[IMAGE – children returning home]

When my children return home, having been dropped off by a friend or neighbor, or they come back from visiting a classmate or having been at a party, I often ask them, “Did you say ‘THANK YOU?’” This is after having said before they left, earlier, “Don’t forget to say ‘THANK YOU’.” I realize it was something my own mother said to me time and time again.

[IMAGE – thankful sun]

How much more should we say THANK YOU to God for life and breath, grace and opportunity?

Thanksgiving is not just a holiday, it’s our way of life...the good life!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.