

# Gratitude for God's Mercy

Psalms 14 & 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Rev. James Ramsey, September 15, 2013, **View From The Ancient Pew** Series #1

Yesterday, your elders met in retreat to talk about the state of East Union and plan for our future in ministry.

One of our focus areas we titled "Care-Connection-Assimilation." How do you feel connected to others in the church? How do you receive care or offer it to others? How do we make sure new people find a place where they can thrive? How do established members remain interested and involved? These are important questions. We discussed several strategies we might implement to enhance congregational connections. One of those strategies might enable and encourage the sharing of our stories. And there are other ideas.

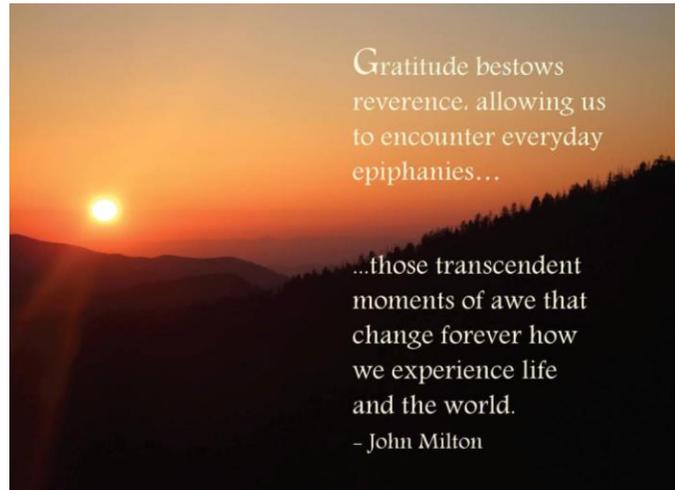
The Letters to Timothy might very well be helpful to us as we continue to mull over the possibilities. For the next several weeks we will entertain the Apostle Paul as he mentors the younger Timothy, and edifies the early church. Today Paul explains his conversion to the faith – how he came to be a disciple of Jesus. We have several accounts of this in the Bible, what we know as "The Damascus Road Conversion," in the Book of Acts, as well as brief references in some of Paul's other letters, so we know what to expect.



You might remember that Paul was formerly Saul, and he was a persecutor of Jesus' followers. He was officially a Pharisee, an out-spoken leader of the Jewish establishment, and he saw the Christian way as a threat to his order. But the risen Jesus spoke to Saul, saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me." Through that holy exchange, Saul was blinded. He was commanded to go to the house of a follower of Jesus, who laid hands on him. And so Saul became Paul, the Apostle, and a great spokesman of the Christian faith.

Paul is “telling his story.” Paul lives with this sense that Christ saved him and he is thankful. While he once had no sense of gratitude, it now pervades his being. God’s mercy radically changed the trajectory of his life. Gratitude for that mercy no doubt shaped him every day after that.

Poet John Milton penned:  
*Gratitude bestows reverence,  
allowing us to encounter everyday  
epiphanies...those transcendent  
moments of awe that change  
forever how we experience life and  
the world.*

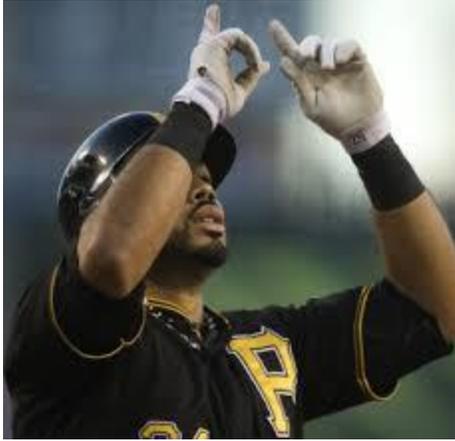


Paul’s journey is unique. Paul tells it like it is. “I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence.” Not only did Paul persecute followers of Christ (before his conversion), but he identifies himself as “foremost” among sinners. It is as if he is saying, no matter how big a sinner you are, I was bigger. No matter how bad you think you are, I am worse.

Yet even Paul received mercy so that Jesus Christ might make him “an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life.” If Christ showed mercy on Paul, chief among sinners, then Christ might show mercy on anyone, certainly on you, no matter what sins you have committed, no matter how unfaithful you have been, no matter what your past might look like.

Paul’s puts his story out there, in order to help and encourage others. But Paul does not dwell on the past. The passage begins, after all, with a statement of thanksgiving: “I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service.”

Paul makes himself vulnerable, admits his glaring faults of the past – with the goal that he might compel his people -- of the salvation brought about by God through Christ. Paul, himself, is just an example of the truth of the Gospel, not a hero-figure...Paul would never claim he brought about his own conversion. God in Christ is the hero. Make no mistake, Paul wants to insist, it is God alone who deserves the honor and glory.

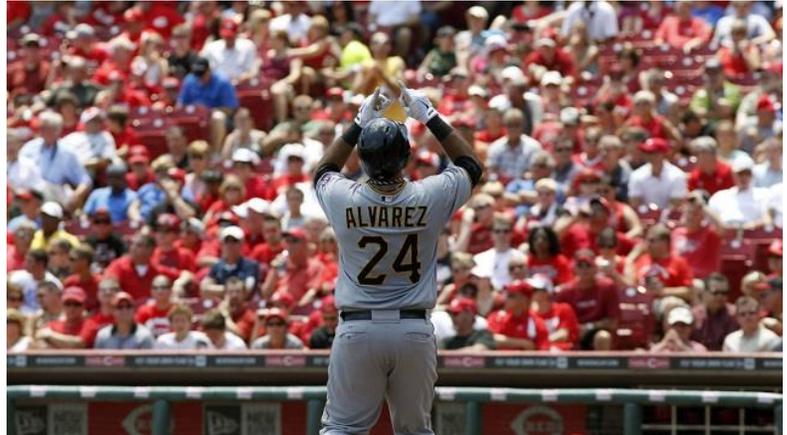


I've been watching a lot more baseball this year than usual, at least more than the last 20 years! The Pirates are relevant again. Hallelujah! Watching all this baseball I've noticed a few things. Baseball players spit a lot. And they fuss with their uniforms in embarrassing ways. But, there are a good number of players who seem to be men of faith.

When Pedro Alvarez hits a home run, which has been pretty often this year, he points to heaven, as if to say, in very Pauline fashion, "it is God who deserves the honor and glory." Neil Walker and Andrew McCutcheon practice similar gestures. I appreciate that Pedro, Neil and Andrew seem have an "Attitude of Gratitude." They remind themselves and us that God is with them, and they give God credit.

Do you give God credit? Do you have an "Attitude of Gratitude?" Are you thankful for God's mercy in your life? Can you build that into your story?

Moravian Christians have an old prayer:



Father, through your Son we have learned that grace is when you give us what we don't deserve; mercy is when you don't give us what we do deserve. Praise God! Amen....

Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve; mercy is when God doesn't give us what we do...

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

