

11.23.2017 Thanksgiving Day (Matthew 6:25-34)

Two men were walking through a field one day when they spotted an angry bull. Instantly they darted toward the nearest fence. The raging bull followed in hot pursuit, and it was soon apparent they wouldn't make it.

Terrified, the one shouted to the other, "Put up a prayer, John. We're in for it!"

John answered, "I can't. I've never made a public prayer in my life."

"But your daddy was a preacher – surely he taught you some sort of prayer! So pray John, pray! The bull is catching up to us."

"All right," said John, "I'll say the only prayer I know, the one my father used to repeat at the table: 'O Lord, for what we are about to receive, make us truly thankful.'"

We're here today to give thanks. And hopefully, not only to give thanks, but to feel truly thankful. It's not always easy to feel thankful. In this difficult world it's much easier to feel anxious, worried, lonely, or distressed, like the bulls are catching up with us.

That's where Jesus meets us today. In the midst of our anxiety and fear, Jesus says, "*Be not anxious for your life*" (Matthew 6:25). In our Gospel reading, He speaks to a particular audience and lists such things as: What you will eat, what you will drink, or what you will wear, but this morning, He speaks personally to each one of us. Whatever giant you face today: physical pain, troubled relationships, financial difficulties, loneliness, or heartache... To me and to you, Jesus says, "*Be not anxious for your life.*"

So often we find it difficult to follow His instructions and not worry about our lives, but St. Paul seems to take that instruction even a step further by telling Christians to: "*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Paul wasn't anxious or worried about his life, but truly thankful in every circumstance. It didn't matter how desperate the situation appeared, Paul knew that the same God who met his needs yesterday, would faithfully meet his needs today. Everything in this world may change, but God does not change. In the book of Malachi (3:6) God tells us, "*For I am the Lord, I do*

not change” and in the book of Hebrews (13:8) we hear this truth repeated with these words: “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*” In our ever-changing world, a world where change is so often accompanied by heartache or difficulty, we serve a never-changing God. His love never changes. His mercy never changes. His ability to provide for us and to meet our every need never changes. Paul’s example shows us that thankfulness to God is not a self-centered appreciation for the things God does for us, but a God-centered appreciation for the faithfulness of God in our lives.

We should also recognize that Paul’s “attitude of gratitude” wasn’t a product of an easy, care-free life. Paul talks about how difficult his life was in 2 Corinthians (11:23-27). There he writes, “*Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*” That is the man who wrote, “*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*” Paul knew hard times, and he accepted “*all circumstances*” as God’s will for him. He tells us to give thanks, not as a person who has never experienced trial or sorrow, but as a brother who knows what it means to suffer.

Jesus said, “*Be not anxious for your life,*” for your Heavenly Father knows your every need. “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*” (Matthew 6:33) When we consider St. Paul’s example, it appears this Scripture is key. “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*” In other words: Instead of worrying about your life, seek God. Strive to draw closer to Him, to His kingdom, to His righteousness, because as we do what we can, God does what we cannot.

Consider these examples of that truth: Noah; God told Noah to build an ark, when the Creator of the Universe obviously could have provided one without

his help. Moses; God told Moses to stretch his rod over the Red Sea, when he clearly didn't need any assistance in parting the water and defeating the Egyptian army. Joshua; His armies were told to march around the fortified city of Jericho, when their activity had nothing to do with the city's fall.

As we do what we can, God does what we cannot. Noah, Moses, and Joshua all provide historic examples of that truth, but here is the greatest example, and one that is far more personal: You and I work out "*our own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Phil. 2:12) and God gives the life of His one and only Son so that we may be forgiven and reconciled to Him. He provides the miraculous intervention where our efforts fall miserably short, and as we work with Him, that work honors God, and transforms us.

There will always be days when it seems the bulls are catching up with us, when our challenges seem too great, but as we learn to trust God with our lives and to seek first His kingdom, we see more clearly "*what great love the Father has lavished on us*" (1 John 3:1). We have no reason to be anxious, for we know that God gave the precious life of His Son for our Salvation, and that is the evidence that He is always doing what is best for us, in every circumstance. This Thanksgiving, consider God's love as it was manifested on the Cross, and be thankful.