

A Thankful Heart

Scripture: Colossians 4:2 – 6 and Matthew 2:1 – 2 & 7 – 12

Thanksgiving Sunday 2023

I started this message by researching turkeys in the Holy Land and guess what? There are no turkeys in the holy Land. There are 591 species of birds in the holy Land but no wild turkeys!

So here is a story from the USA – two wild turkeys stood on a country lane. The driver of a car stopped his car and wondered how close he could get to the two wild turkeys. He got out of his car slowly and walked towards the turkeys. Then he stopped because he thought the turkeys had noticed him. To his surprise, the two wild turkeys started walking towards him! Their heads were bobbing and they walked right past him. The man began to wonder – how sharp are their beaks and claws? Once they had passed him and they were now between him and his car, he began to think that this was not a bright idea. The man decided to walk away from the turkeys and his car. And wouldn't you know it – the turkeys followed him as he walked away!

How quickly the tables had turned? The hunted had become the hunter! In a short while the turkeys speed up their walking and they shorten the distance between them and the man. Foolishly, the man had wondered if the turkeys were just too dumb to be scared of him. He was not going to be injured by a wild turkey! So he fled into the woods and lost the turkeys. He waited in the woods for another 20 minutes and returned to his car only to see the two turkeys peeking around his abandoned car! End of story!

In the Old Testament, David did not seem dangerous to Goliath. Goliath had tainted the Hebrew army. Goliath had told the army of the Hebrews to send out their best warrior and he would give their flesh to the birds and wild animals – not wild turkeys!

David flipped the script when he seized the initiative. He ran towards Goliath, not because he was foolish thinking Goliath was sacred of him, but because he was confident in God. David shouted – ‘This very day, the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel!’

Goliath was puzzled by David’s boldness and his aggressive behavior. Goliath thought – What is going on! Then it hit him right between the eyes! End of story!

It is nature for small animals to run away from people, shepherds, and to avoid giants. It is natural for us to hide in the woods of life until we think trouble is gone.

But with God’s help and His power – let us run towards the fight!

Seneca, the great philosopher in ancient Rome from 4BC to 65 AD, was once accused by the empress of Rome of adultery. After he was sentenced to death, the emperor Claudius instead exiled Seneca to Corsica, perhaps because he suspected the charge to be false. This reprieve may have shaped Seneca’s view on thankfulness. Seneca wrote – ‘homicide, tyrants, thieves, adulterers, robbers, and traitors there will always be, but worse than all of these is the crime of ingratitude!’

A contemporary of Seneca is the Apostle Paul who would have agreed with Seneca when he wrote – ‘One of the causes of the downward collapse of humankind is that they refuse to give thanks to God.’ Three times the Apostle Paul challenged his fellow believers in Christ to be grateful, to show gratitude! Paul said that we should be overflowing with thankfulness.

We should let God’s peace rule in our hearts. We should respond with thankfulness to God. In fact, gratitude ought to characterize our prayers.

God’s great kindness to us should remind us of one of life’s great realities. God not only deserves our love and worship, but he also deserves our thankful hearts. Everything that is good in life comes from God.

With all that we have been given in Christ, gratitude should be as natural as breathing. May we respond to god’s gracious gifts be expressing our gratitude to God and Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving is a wonderful time to be grateful! Thanksgiving is wonderful to have a thankful heart. May we on this Thanksgiving have a grateful and thankful heart!

Coming very soon for us is Advent – a time of trusting God’s foresight. We know what lies ahead for us during Advent, but we often get lost in world problems. We often get lost in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season. We do not trust God’s foresight!

It is like our GPS is not working. We seem to be at a standstill as we look at our political situation, our racial injustice, and the wars going on in the world. We do not know what lies ahead for us?

God can change our direction. God can, in a dream, give us a change of direction like he did for the wise men. The wise men came from far off and they came to worship Jesus. King Herod was disturbed by the news of a new born king of the Jews. He wanted no part of a rival king so he lied to the magi saying – ‘Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report back to me so that I too may go and worship him.’ But the magi were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod so they returned to their country by another route.

God will guide our steps too! As we travel through life’s highways, we can trust that God can see ahead of us and remain confident that God will make our path straight as we submit to his direction.

Let us pray:

Father, whenever we are afraid, remind us that your Holy Spirit is in us. Help us run in your strength.

Loving Father, forgive us for the times we have taken your guidance for granted. Forgive for the times we have taken your blessings for granted. Create in us a thankful heart so we may honor and praise you with all that we do and say.

And O God, we often cannot see the road ahead of us like you see it. Please give us discernment to know when a change in direction is coming from you. Amen.

Happy Thanksgiving!

