

Be Thankful

Joshua 24:18

“Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”

In her reflection on the readings for today, Lutheran Pastor Rev Dr Janet Hunt concludes with the following question, “What does it look like to 'choose' to serve God in the day to day? ” Her question puts into perspective the focus on choice which is at the heart of our theme for today, which is ‘Be Thankful.’ In a real sense to be thankful is a choice. We can choose to be thankful or to be grateful for who we are and for whose we are or we can choose to be so ego centred that we feel we are the be all and end all of all life and there is no need to be accountable to anyone, not even God. On the other hand we may feel we can be accountable to those in authority but once we are on “our own” we can choose to do as we please with our lives. Dr Hunt’s question is one way to cause us to rethink the purpose of our lives and determine how and to what extent God is at the centre of our lives. It is only on this basis of God ac central to who we are that we can choose to be grateful.

Dr Hunt raises the further question as to whether, in the final analysis we choose God or God chooses us? Her response is that it’s a bit of both. God’s choice of us

to live eternally with him is done purely on the basis of love. God chooses because God loves and all of creation unconditionally. Yet, as we see from the first reading from the book of Joshua, the people are challenged to make a choice. With some among them already making the choice to mingle with the people of the land, Israel is reminded by Joshua that she is not of the land but of God. To this end, Israel is to choose to serve God despite the attraction of the temptations and lures in and around the surrounding communities.

Our focus on the season of intentional discipleship is an opportunity, similar to the one offered to Israel, to make a choice for God. In the prayer for discipleship at the back of the bulletin we pray ‘grant that as we ‘yes’ to the call to discipleship, your Holy Spirit will enable us so completely to commit all the areas of our lives to his service...’ The critical point here is that God needs faithful and dedicated members of the faith to practice what they preach. Making a commitment for God and his service requires sacrifice and dedication from the person of faith. It is this commitment that ought to propel them action favour of God.

To be thankful is a choice. Just as the Israelites under Joshua’s leadership chose to serve the LORD because he is their God, in the same way people can choose to be thankful because there is One who provides for all our needs. It is true there are

some persons who do not acknowledge the existence of God and hence this choice is not an option for them. For us as people of faith, however, we can choose to be thankful because as the writer of I Thess 5:18 reminds us “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” We can choose to give God thanks at all times, whether or not the time is favourable, because this is God’s will or plan for our lives. Giving thanks to God was seen as essential to the Church in Thessalonica because the people were beginning to lose hope that Jesus will return. The writer encourages them not to lose hope but to give thanks.

Tithing is one way the Church encourages us to give thanks to God. We are encouraged to give a tenth of our earnings back to God. Christians are encouraged to tithe, not as if God needs our money nor are we invited to do so as a means of exploiting people who are economically deprived. It is for this reason we refer to the tithe as Freewill Offering. On page 404 of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) here is what the Church in the Province of the West Indies (CPWI or Anglican Church) has to say about Freewill Offering or Tithing. Every baptized and confirmed is to practice being thankful by “giving money in support for God’s work, bearing in mind the claims of tithing as an expression of gratitude for and dedication of our material possessions to God and his service.” Here we see that giving to further the work of God is an expression or sign of gratitude for our

material possessions. Notice too that giving to God as a sign of gratitude is just one among eleven things the Church invites us to commit to in order to practice discipleship. Our job description as Christian disciples is well laid out here and giving thanks in all circumstances is just one of the many duties we are called upon to perform as Christians.

In the prayer for intentional discipleship at the back of the bulletin we are invited to put our life of gratitude into action. We are invited to do so by “completely committing all areas of our lives to God’s service, that is, our personal, family, Church, work, recreational and social lives.” To help us do this in an intentional way Dr Hunt invites us to think about a few questions. These questions serve as a guide to help us practice intentional discipleship. The following questions she says should guide the way we live on a daily basis.

1. Will I choose to live in kindness or will I let old hurts taint my responses to those around me?
2. Will I close my office door or will I respond to the cry of pain in the outer office? Or on the other end of the phone line? Or in our neighborhood and beyond?
3. Will I work for justice in the world or will I cower in my fear that I might offend?
4. Will I entrust to God a portion of what I have been given or will I hoard it all away in fear?
5. Will I begin and end my day in prayer or will I try to go it alone?¹

¹ <http://words.dancingwiththeword.com/2015/08/do-i-choose-or-am-i-chosen.html>

She concludes these questions on a note of thankfulness by saying “ I thank God every day that God made the ultimate choice for me first. Because of this, all of my choices every day are made under a benevolent cloud of grace.”² To this end we can conclude with three reasons for giving thanks based on the questions raised by Dr Hunt.

First, to be thankful is to choose our response to God and to each other on a daily basis. To be thankful is to choose to respond to the needs of everyone, especially those closest to us. For example, recently we are told people in Arnett Gardens heard shouts of rape but did not take it seriously. Next thing you know a teenager was found dead. We need to cultivate the desire to respond to the needs of others even when we feel helpless.

Second, we are to be thankful by doing acts of justice. We may know of families experiencing violence of any kind. Women and girls in particular are often victims of domestic violence. Justice is intervening in ways that will change the situation for good for all concerned. Sometime ago there was a cry for gender justice here on the UWI campus as some female students were being attacked by their male counter parts. Justice was done to curb these activities.

² <http://words.dancingwiththeword.com/2015/08/do-i-choose-or-am-i-chosen.html>

Third, we can be thankful by giving our tithe to God and also by giving to those who are in need. Individuals and families around the world face various needs and require assistance. As we begin the new academic year of school and university there will be numerous students facing various needs. Hopefully we can appreciate why the writer of the letter to the Thessalonians says we are to give thanks in all circumstances. Part of giving thanks is to be the answer to the prayer of those who are in need.

Let us therefore make the choice to be thankful at all times. Let us as we draw near to the Eucharist, which is the greatest act of thanksgiving, renew our commitment to cultivate an attitude of gratitude and always be thankful. We could start by noting right now at least one thing or one person we can be thankful for; let us offer thanks to God for that one thing/person and pray for that one thing/person as we give thanks in the Eucharist. In the name...