

And For Everything Else, Thanks
Thanks for everything that brings us joy

Psalm 103:1-12

Ypsilanti First United Methodist Church

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Rev. Melanie Lee Carey

A few years ago, I shared with you the amazing story of Patrick Henry Hughes, and his dad John Hughes, who are the only two person member of the University of Louisville Marching Band. You may recall a story I told about how John Hughes, Patrick Henry's dad, pushes him around in his wheel chair during the half time shows at the Cardinals football games—maneuvering the wheel chair in all the marching formations. They have even marched in The Orange Bowl.

Patrick Henry was born twenty years ago with an extremely rare genetic disorder: arms that would not straighten, legs that would never be able to walk, and permanent blindness due to the fact that he had was also born with no eyes.

Today not only is Patrick Henry a trumpet player in the marching band at the University of Louisville, he is also a Spanish major, a nationally recognized pianist, and singer and the author of a new book called I am Potential: Eight Lessons on Living. Loving and Reaching your Dreams.

In this wonderful book, Patrick Henry writes over and over again about how much he has to be thankful for and how truly blessed he is. Which is a pretty amazing statement when you think about his life story. But Patrick Henry sees it differently; instead of looking at what he doesn't have, instead he focuses on what he does have—and he writes about his gratitude with these words.

"I've known from an early age that I was dealt a hand in life different from the cards others got. That's okay, because I also learned God would help me play that hand if I was willing to accept what I was missing and be thankful for what I *can* do..."

When I meet folks, they often ask me if I had trouble accepting my disabilities. I'm not sure they believe me when I say no, because they tell me they would be really angry, or sad, or bitter if they couldn't walk or if they lost their sight. Maybe so, but these days, I can't even imagine feeling that way.

At first, it's natural to wish we could change the past. "How wonderful life would be," we tell ourselves, "if only this or that had happened instead." But where does that kind of thinking get you? Nowhere, and worse, it keeps you stuck there. I can honestly say I've learned that lesson and I do accept my life as it is.

When I think about all I've been through, I'm pretty amazed at how well things have gone. Twenty years after the fateful day I was born, I'm attending college, majoring in Spanish. I sing, play the piano and trumpet and am a member of the University's marching band. I've been able to travel the world and meet thousands of people doing what I love most--performing music. I have so much to be thankful for." (pp. 18-19)

For the next several weeks we will be exploring the topics of thanksgiving and gratitude. And for Everything Else thanks is our theme—and our bulletin cover today reminds us of the many blessings we have in our lives, blessings we often overlook and are blind to.

So often we focus on what we don't have, on what's missing or lacking in our lives. So often we focus on what's not there that we think should be. So often we focus on what is still wanting in our lives, rather than celebrating the blessings that are already there for us.

Sometimes it takes a blind person like Patrick Henry Hughes to help us to really see. For while it is important to have goals and dreams about the future, life is truly about celebrating what we do have, what is there for us and what we can do. Like Patrick Henry Hughes, we have much to be thankful for. And for everything else, Thanks.

As the words of our scripture today remind us—"Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all God's benefits." What this means is Don't forget all the many blessings you have from God. Don't overlook them, or turn a blind eye to them. Don't forget God's blessings.

There is God's forgiveness and healing, there is God's redemption of you from the pits of life, there is God's love, mercy and amazing grace which wash over you at all times, and God's goodness which fills you so that your youth is renewed like the eagles, There is the fact that God works justice for the oppressed and that God is merciful and gracious and that God's steadfast love abounds and the fact that God doesn't deal with us according to our sins, but rather according to God's love. God's love is as large as the distance from east to west and as high as the heavens. These are the blessings we have, among countless others, and sometimes, oftentimes we forget them, or overlook them.

It may sound overly simplistic to say that what we need to do is stop and count our blessings, but I believe it's really true. How easily we overlook all that we have, especially God's love and grace. How easily we focus instead on what we lack, on what is not there, on what is missing. Especially in these days of economic woes, fears and anxiety let us not forget God's blessings. And for everything else, thanks.

In 1897, Johnson Oatman Jr. wrote the lyrics to the hymn called "Count Your Blessings." His words remind us of an important truth, we have so much to thank God for and so much to be thankful for and sometimes we just have to remind ourselves of all the blessings we do have. Sometimes we just need to sit down and count our blessings.

Count your blessings
 Name them one by one
 Count your blessings
 See what God has done
 Count your blessings
 Name them one by one
 Count your many blessings
 See what God has done

When upon life's billows
You are tempest tossed
When you are discouraged
Thinking all is lost
Count your many blessings
Name them one by one
And it will surprise you
What the Lord has done

When you look at others
With their lands and gold
Think that Christ has promised
You His wealth untold
Count your many blessings
Money cannot buy
Your reward in heaven
Nor your home on high

So, amid the conflict
Whether great or small
Do not be discouraged
God is over all
Count your many blessings
Angels will attend
Help and comfort give you
To your journey's end

Count your blessings, Name them one by one
Count your blessings, See what God has done
Count your blessings, Name them one by one
Count your many blessings, See what God has done

May we remember all God's blessings in our lives, most especially God's love.

We have so much to be thankful for.

Thanks be to God.
And for everything else, Thanks. Amen

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