

Denice K. Leslie  
June 11, 2006  
Recognition Sunday  
Isaiah 12: 3 – 6  
Philippians 1: 3 – 11  
John 17

## Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart

I love to read over and over again Jesus' prayer on behalf of the disciples in John 17. In the Upper Room before his death, in deep, extended prayer he pours out his heart to God on our behalf. Listen to Jesus pray: He tells God,

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me... they have kept your word...they have believed that you sent me...I am asking on their behalf because they are yours... and yours are mine....Father, protect them, .... I guarded them....I ask you to protect them....and I speak these things ...so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. Sanctify them in the truth.....as you have sent me so I send them into the world...

I ask not only on behalf of these-- but also on behalf of those who WILL believe in me through their word... that they may all be one -- -so that the world may know that you have loved them even as you have loved me... (and) Father I desire that those...whom you have given me may be with me where I am going."

How Jesus treasures us! This is a prayer of supplication and gratitude. This is a prayer of deep love and appreciation for us—his disciples! The question is: do we treasure ourselves? Do we treasure each other? Do we treasure the world?

Because we don't see ourselves the way Jesus sees us, do we? I mean how often have you heard a sermon on the fumbling, bumbling and thick headedness of Peter—who is a stand in—in many respects for our own fumble, bumble, thick headedness in not understanding who Jesus is or what he's all about and what that means for us?

The truth is, this is not the whole truth about us, and it has nothing really to do with

God's love for us. But there are so many voices we grow up hearing that gradually block out or mask the bigger truth.

How many of us here were raised with the constant admonition that we ought not to think too much of ourselves because we might get a big head?

How many of us were gradually stifled by social conventions that dictated what colors or shoes we could wear and in what season? You know, no white shoes before spring, navy blue is okay all year long, blue doesn't go with green....As a young woman, my grandmother would not have been caught dead going into the City—meaning San Francisco, without a hat and gloves!

Now don't get me wrong, we also learned very important civil skills such as common courtesy such as please and thank you, not interrupting, using inside voices, and respect for elders and honoring the Lord's day by dressing up—things we all miss and which make and keep human life human. I'm referring more to those things which cause us to look around and question our self-worth because someone might judge us if we don't conform.

Gradually, ever so gradually, our God-given wholeness, our self image as God's children is worn down, or covered over by other messages in the world around us. Often times by well-meaning people around us—people who love us and who are trying to do "what's good for us."

Until we reach a point as adults where we've had it drilled into us that the meaning of "it is better to give than to receive" means we never, ever deserve to be recognized or praised or to take pride in having made a contribution of our time, our skill, our talents because God would frown on that.

But here is Jesus reminding us of just how precious we are. How grateful he is for our dedication, our faith, our willingness to serve in his name. Here is Jesus telling us we are Gods and he, Jesus is in us just as Jesus is in God and we are all one in God's love.

He isn't enumerating all our faults and failures and places we haven't measured up.

He isn't bemoaning "these incredibly inadequate people you've given me, Lord..." He isn't even praying here about his approaching death. No, his first concern, his first thought is for us and our well-being.

His first thought is to place us in God's care and keeping and to make clear how wonderful we are!

In the hour of his approaching death,

Jesus overriding desire is: "So my people can experience my joy complete in them."<sup>1</sup>

He wishes us joy! He gifts us with his joy: joy in him, joy in ourselves, joy in one another, joy in our discipleship ---

--for the first disciples and for those of us who will become his disciples hundreds of years later-- that we may all, past and present, "become one heart and mind:

"Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you... So that they might be one heart and mind with us."<sup>2</sup>

And Jesus adds: "Then they'll mature in this oneness, and give the godless world evidence that you've sent me and loved them in the same way you've loved me."

It's all about love. And the fruit of love is joy, gratitude, thanksgiving, appreciation, and recognition. This is what God gives us in our discipleship with Jesus. This is what Jesus gives to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what we are called to give the world: joy in God's grace filled love for us.

Today is our Sunday to recognize different folks among us who've served faithfully through out the church year.

As we take time to honor their service, may each and every person here know that you as well are honored, loved, appreciated by your Savior. That he treasures you—just as you are, with grace beyond measure.

May you know that whatever gifts you give, no matter how great or small, how public or private, he knows your heart, he knows your faith, he knows your service and he loves you more than his own life.

Yes, people, God is love. Let the people say, "Thank you, Lord!" Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, paraphrase of John 17, vs. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Jn. 17