



Lutheran Church of the Master

Pastor Kurt Wandrey

“THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS!”

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DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, THE GREAT GERMAN LUTHERAN THEOLOGIAN WHO WAS KILLED IN A NAZI PRISON CAMP, WROTE A COMPLETE THANKSGIVING DAY SERMON IN ONLY A FEW SHORT PARAGRAPHS. I SHARE IT WITH YOU IN THE AUTHOR’S OWN WORDS: “ONLY THEY WHO GIVE THANKS FOR LITTLE THINGS RECEIVE THE BIG THINGS. WE PREVENT GOD FROM GIVING US THE GREAT SPIRITUAL GIFTS HE HAS IN STORE FOR US, BECAUSE WE DO NOT GIVE THANKS FOR DAILY GIFTS.

“WE THINK WE DARE NOT BE SATISFIED WITH THE SMALL MEASURE OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE, & LOVE THAT HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO US, & THAT WE MUST CONSTANTLY BE LOOKING FORWARD EAGERLY FOR THE HIGHEST GOOD. THEN WE DEPLORE THE FACT THAT WE LACK THE DEEP CERTAINTY, THE STRONG FAITH, & THE RICH EXPERIENCE THAT GOD HAS GIVEN TO OTHERS, & WE CONSIDER THIS LAMENT TO BE PIOUS.

“WE PRAY FOR THE BIG THINGS & FORGET TO GIVE THANKS FOR THE ORDINARY, SMALL (& YET REALLY NOT SMALL) GIFTS. HOW CAN GOD ENTRUST GREAT THINGS TO ONE WHO WILL NOT THANKFULLY RECEIVE FROM HIM THE LITTLE THINGS? IF WE DO NOT GIVE THANKS DAILY FOR THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP IN WHICH WE HAVE BEEN PLACED, EVEN WHERE THERE IS NO GREAT EXPERIENCE, NO DISCOVERABLE RICHES, BUT MUCH WEAKNESS, SMALL FAITH & DIFFICULTY; IF ON THE CONTRARY, WE ONLY KEEP COMPLAINING TO GOD THAT EVERYTHING IS SO PALTRY & PETTY, SO FAR FROM WHAT WE EXPECTED, THEN WE HINDER GOD FROM LETTING OUR FELLOWSHIP GROW ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE & RICHES WHICH ARE THERE FOR US ALL IN JESUS CHRIST.”

IN ACCORD WITH BONHOEFFER, AN OLDER & WISER PASTOR ONCE TOLD ME TO TAKE CARE OF THE LITTLE THINGS & LEAVE THE GREAT THINGS TO GOD. TEND TO THE EVERY DAY, SEEMINGLY MUNDANE TASKS THAT NEED TO BE DONE, & DON’T WORRY ABOUT THE BIG STUFF; GOD WILL TEND TO THAT. WE KNOW THAT’S TRUE BECAUSE GOD HAS TAKEN CARE OF THE BIG STUFF. THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS!

JUST LOOK AT CREATION, FROM THE TINIEST UNSEEN PARTICLE OF AN ATOM TO THE VAST EXPANSE OF THE UNIVERSE BILLIONS OF LIGHT YEARS IN SPACE; & THE MARVEL OF US HUMANS IN-BETWEEN WITH INCREDIBLE BEAUTY & FUNCTION ALL AROUND, & ALL BROUGHT INTO BEING OUT OF NOTHING AT ALL. THE FLOOD OF THE WHOLE WORLD & SAVING NOAH’S FAMILY WAS ONE OF GOD’S GREAT THINGS. GOD USED MOSES FOR THE GREAT EXODUS, SAVING HIS PEOPLE & OVERCOMING THE MIGHTIEST RULER & NATION ON EARTH.

THEN GOD'S GREATEST ACT OF ALL, SALVATION FOR ALL WHO BELIEVE, THROUGH HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST. THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS, & WE CAN SURELY COUNT ON GOD TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES & PROMISES FOR US TODAY.

BONHOEFFER APPEALS TO US TO BE THANKFUL, & MATTHEW NOT TO WORRY. I THINK THE TWO GO HAND IN HAND. IF WE ARE TRULY THANKFUL, THERE'S NO NEED NOR WOULD THERE BE ANY TIME FOR WORRY. BUT I'M NOT SURE WE SHOW OUR THANKS EVEN FOR THE GREAT THINGS, LET ALONE ALL OF THE MANY LITTLE THINGS. WHEN WE FOCUS ON THE BLESSINGS WE HAVE INSTEAD OF THE THINGS WE DON'T HAVE, WE WILL REALIZE WE HAVE A LOT! AS OUR STEWARDSHIP THEME THIS YEAR DECLARES, "WE ARE RICH IN EVERYTHING!"

IF YOU'VE EVER WONDERED WHY THIS CONGREGATION IS NOT AS BIG AS SOME OF THE OTHER CHURCHES AROUND US, OR WHY OUR PASTORS AREN'T LIKE RICK WARREN, OR WHY WE DON'T HAVE BIGGER OFFERINGS INSTEAD OF HAVING TO STRUGGLE TO MEET EXPENSES FOR OUR MINISTRY; I THINK BONHOEFFER & MATTHEW TELL US THE REASON WHY.

BONHOEFFER SAYS, "IF WE DO NOT GIVE THANKS DAILY FOR THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP IN WHICH WE HAVE BEEN PLACED, EVEN WHERE THERE IS NO GREAT EXPERIENCE, NO DISCOVERABLE RICHES, BUT MUCH WEAKNESS, SMALL FAITH & DIFFICULTY; IF WE ONLY KEEP COMPLAINING; THEN WE HINDER GOD FROM LETTING OUR FELLOWSHIP GROW." MATTHEW SAYS, "DO NOT WORRY," BECAUSE WE DO. WE'RE IN A TIME & PURPOSE OF PRAYER FOR THIS CONGREGATION EVERY DAY AT 4:32; A REMINDER OF ACTS 4:32, "NOW THE WHOLE GROUP OF THOSE WHO BELIEVED WERE OF ONE HEART & SOUL." HAVE YOU BEEN PRAYING AS OUR CHURCH COUNCIL HAS INVITED ALL OF US TO DO?

NOT ONLY PLEADING FOR THE NEEDS OF OUR CONGREGATION, BUT EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, HAVE YOU BEEN GIVING THANKS FOR ALL THIS? THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED & TALENTED ORGANIST AROUND, THE MOST EXCEPTIONAL & EFFICIENT OFFICE SECRETARY WE COULD ASK FOR, A VERY GIFTED CHOIR & EXCELLENT DIRECTOR, CAPABLE LEADERS, ADEQUATE PASTORS & DEDICATED STAFF, OPEN, WELL-EQUIPPED FACILITIES THAT SERVE THE CHURCH AS WELL AS ALL KINDS OF COMMUNITY GROUPS, A SCHOOL THAT EDUCATES CHILDREN, PARENTS & FAMILIES IN A CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENT, MINISTRIES TO THE HUNGRY, THE HOMELESS & EVEN TO PRISONERS. ARE YOU THANKFUL FOR IT ALL? HOW DO YOU EXPRESS YOUR THANKFULNESS? WITH A GENEROUS OFFERING & EVEN MORE GENEROUS SERVICE? OR EVEN A HEARTFELT COMPLIMENT?

AS MANY OF YOU KNOW, WE MADE A QUICK TRIP TO ARIZONA TO GET TOGETHER WITH DIANN'S FAMILY & TO SEE HER MOTHER WHO HAS BONE CANCER. SHE HAD ASKED ME IF I WOULD GIVE THEM ALL COMMUNION. I USED SOME WINE FROM A BOTTLE THAT WAS SITTING OUT. APPARENTLY IT HAD BEEN UNCORKED OVERNIGHT & STARTED TO OXIDZE SLIGHTLY.

AFTER I FINISHED WITH THE BLESSING, A FEW FAMILY MEMBERS COMPLAINED, "THAT WINE WAS TERRIBLE!" DIANN'S MOM MOTIONED TO ME TO COME CLOSER TO HER, & SHE SAID, "THANK YOU, KURT, THAT MEANT SO MUCH!" WHO DO YOU THINK BENEFITTED MOST FROM THAT COMMUNION? WHO DO YOU THINK PLEASED GOD WITH THEIR HEARTFELT THANKS?

IN A FEW MOMENTS, WE WILL AGAIN HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO RECEIVE THE GIFT OF JESUS HIMSELF, OUR LORD'S OWN BODY & BLOOD, AT HIS TABLE, FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF ALL OUR SINS; FOR LIFE & SALVATION. WILL WE ALLOW THIS THANKSGIVING FEAST TO FILL US UP WITH ALL THAT WE REALLY NEED; A BIT OF BREAD & A SIP OF WINE TO COMPLETELY SATISFY US? THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS! ARE WE TRULY THANKFUL FOR THE SMALL & THE GREAT THINGS GOD HAS DONE FOR US & GIVEN TO US?

THIS MORNING'S DAILY DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET "CHRIST IN OUR HOME" OFFERED THESE WORDS OF CONFESSION: "GRACIOUS GOD, LIKE MANY BELIEVERS BEFORE US, WE COMPLAIN WHEN THINGS DO NOT GO OUR WAY. WE WANT ABUNDANCE OF EVERYTHING RATHER THAN WHAT IS SUFFICIENT TO SUSTAIN US. WE WOULD RATHER BE ELSEWHERE THAN WHERE WE ARE AT THE MOMENT. WE WOULD RATHER HAVE THE GIFTS YOU GIVE TO OTHERS THAN WHAT YOU PROVIDE FOR US. WE WOULD RATHER HAVE YOU SERVE US THAN SERVE YOU. FORGIVE OUR LACK OF GRATITUDE FOR WHAT YOU GIVE."

AS BONHOEFFER DID, NOW I APPEAL TO YOU, GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR EVERYTHING YOU HAVE, & YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT WHAT YOU DO NOT HAVE. MATTHEW TELLS US TO "STRIVE FIRST FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD & HIS RIGHTEOUS;" & LEAVE THE REST UP TO GOD. GOD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS! & GOD IS NOT YET FINISHED. AMEN.