

**McCabe United Methodist Church**  
Thankfulness Series: Thanksgiving Worship Service

***“Contentment and Thanksgiving”***

Sermon on 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22  
Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

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Do you know the Family Circus cartoon? It's in the paper every day in the comic section? It's at the bottom of the page. Little Billy and his family are just working through the everyday things of life.

We used to have one of these hanging on the fridge in our kitchen. It was in the spring. It was the last day of school and Little Billy was giving thanks!!!

School was out for the summer.

In the little pictures swirling around his head, Billy had visions of swimming and riding bike and playing football and staying up late and having picnics.

Billy had big plans for the summer.

Then, in the next image, there was Billy, sprawled out on the couch. It was later that same week. Billy was lamenting about how BORED he was! Summer had settled in and DISCONTENT had replaced a grateful heart.

At Thanksgiving, we have all kinds of dreams. We gather around the table and we give thanks. We give thanks for honest and noble things. We give thanks for family and friends. We give thanks for shelter and food on the table. We give thanks to God, for the blessings in our lives.

We gather around the table taking time to give thanks to God... But even before we're done with the dishes, Thanksgiving fades into discontent.

The biggest newspaper of the year has arrived. There are more ads stuffing the paper, than there was stuffing in the Thanksgiving turkey. We finish dinner. We study the ads. We need a game plan. Do we get to bed early or do we stay up all night? We need to be at the stores before sunrise, or it might even be Thanksgiving Day.

There's only a limited supply. Shopping like this isn't just for fun. Shopping like this has to pay off. So In less than 24 hours, we move from giving thanks, to wanting more and more.

God, family, and friends... They quickly fade to possessions and discontent.

Isn't this what the Apostle Paul was writing about in his letter to the Philippians? He wrote:

*I know what it's like to have more than enough. I know what it's like to be in need. I know what it's like to be hungry. I know what it's like to be well fed.*

*I have learned to be CONTENT with whatever I have.*

Paul was beaten and battered. He'd been locked up and he'd roamed free. BUT, regardless, Paul gave thanks because he'd found the key to contentment.

Paul wrote about this key to contentment in the reading we have tonight. His letter to the Thessalonian Church. Hear God speaking through Paul's writing in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians: Chapter 5:12-22. It's titled Final **Instructions**

*<sup>12</sup>Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you (acknowledge those) who care for you in the Lord and (acknowledge those) who admonish you.<sup>13</sup>Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.*

*Live in peace with each other.<sup>14</sup>And we urge you, brothers and sisters, (to) warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. <sup>15</sup>Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.*

*<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray continually, <sup>18</sup>**GIVE THANKS in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***

*<sup>19</sup>Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Do not treat prophecies with contempt<sup>21</sup> but test them all; (Friends...) hold on to what is good, <sup>22</sup>(and) reject every kind of evil.*

Contentment comes in working in Jesus' name. Contentment comes in living peacefully with one another. Contentment comes in comforting the discouraged and in helping the weak. Contentment comes in being patient with one another.

We give thanks and we pursue good, rejoicing always, praying continually, we GIVE THANKS in EVERY situation.

These are easy words to say...

Sometimes they're even easy to live...

BUT sometimes these are the most challenging words we might hear.

Give THANKS in EVERY situation. Be patient with everyone. Pursue what is good as defined by God. Live in peace with one another.

What does that look like in our nation, or in our community, in the church, or in our lives?

There was a sign outside a little old Methodist church that said:  
The best things in life aren't things.

During this season of Thanksgiving, as we think about contentment and thanksgiving, this sign makes a lot of sense doesn't it?

The best things in life aren't things.

The world tells us we find contentment in money and possessions.  
The Bible tells us we find contentment in God alone.

I have a friend who hit a brick wall. He didn't literally run into a brick wall. He had one of those life experiences where life stopped short and turned on a dime.

In real life, this happens sometimes. A new diagnosis, a deal gone bad, a lost job, a loved one is gone.

In my friend's case he was a pillar in the community until the police raided his office. He's given permission to share this.

We were having lunch at one point. He was waiting for trial. We finished lunch. We were about to leave. I asked how I could pray for him this week. And his answer stopped me in my tracks...

He paused and thought about it. He answered: Please pray for mercy and please pray for forgiveness. He got tears in his eyes. He steadied his voice and he said: please pray for thanksgiving.

THANKSGIVING...???What...???

He was likely on his way to jail.

He explained saying that if he wouldn't have hit that brick wall he'd still be spiraling out of control. He'd still be PLAYING religion, instead of growing in his faith. If he hadn't hit that brick wall, even though he grew up in the church, he would have never met God, in Jesus Christ. If he hadn't hit that brick wall, who knows what might have happened.

Paul wrote: "I have learned to be content in all circumstances."

May the grace and peace of Jesus Christ fill you with contentment and carry your Thanksgiving beyond Thursday.