

McCabe United Methodist Church

Thanksgiving Series: The Bucket List

November 18 & 19, 2017

The Bucket List: "Before I die, I Want To Rejoice and Give Thanks"

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Prayer

Almighty God, may the words of my mouth and may the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. You alone are our Rock. You alone are our Redeemer. Amen.

Last summer we were going to Medora. We stopped in the little town of Taylor, ND. We stopped by the house where my mom grew up. It's the same house where we visited my grandma when us kids were growing up...

I don't know if I should be embarrassed for admitting this, but maybe you've done it too. You stop by, unannounced, at a stranger's house, and when they answer, you ask if you can come and look around their house for a little bit.

We did this. The current owner was very gracious. She let us in to have a tour. As we walked around, we thought about my grandma and her impact on us from decades ago.

If we have fond memories, we don't mind remembering loved ones and how they impacted us. Grandma died over 30 years ago, yet we still give thanks for her impact on our lives.

Even so, we don't really like to talk about the reality of one day dying ourselves do we?

Researchers say we're really quite good at avoiding the topic. We live life and we avoid the topic of dying whenever possible. Yet, at some point, we will each be confronted with it.

Researchers call the moment of realization that we can no longer avoid dying, they call it the existential slap. The existential slap is that moment we see the x-ray or we get the news or we have the accident and we realize there's nothing anyone can do. The existential slap is the

moment something happens that awakens us to the fact that our days are numbered.

I share this because, God, through the writer of our Hebrews Scripture, calls us to live life keeping our eyes on Jesus and running the race of life and faith with perseverance.

In our Philippians Scripture, the Apostle Paul wrote as he was sitting in prison. He was literally in jail and he wrote that because of his faith in Jesus Christ, he could rejoice. The Apostle Paul wrote: Rejoice in the Lord Always, I say rejoice. The Lord is at hand. Don't worry about anything, instead, pray about everything. Don't worry, instead pray with thanksgiving. Let your requests be made know to God. And when you do make your requests known to God, that peace that passes all understanding, that peace we can't ultimately explain using mere words, that peace will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.

Ever have one of those days, or one of those weeks, that just awakens you to the brokenness of the world? There's another school shooting, another sexual misconduct allegation, an earthquake killing hundreds, divers called in to search for missing men who fell through the ice. There's a teenager diagnosed with an incurable illness 60 days earlier and now the family is gathering at the hospital for an early Thanksgiving together. The following day they will be turning off the young man's life support. Or maybe it's a bad grade, or an overdue bill. Some days all it might take is not being able to find the car keys or your dog getting loose.

And we hear the writer of Hebrews saying: Keep your eyes on Jesus. And with our eyes on Jesus run the race of life with perseverance.

And the Apostle Paul going further saying: As hard as it might be let's find reasons to be grateful. Let's rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS and pray with thanksgiving. Let's let our requests be made know to God.

Some of you know my folks took a tumble a couple weeks ago. My dad got a big, beautiful black eye. And mom... She fractured her pelvis in a couple places. It doesn't matter if you're in your teens or if you're in your early 80's, if you take a substantial fall life can change in an instant.

Sometimes it's at times like this that we become more aware of our bucket lists. We become aware of the things we have, or have not completed. We become aware of some things we still want to check off our list or get closure on.

I was thinking about this with regard to my folks. Mom was in the hospital very early in her recovery process. She wasn't really walking and she was in quite a bit of pain. Things were still relatively uncertain regarding next steps.

Mom said to me: You know, I'm thankful. I'm thankful your dad didn't hit his head any harder and really get hurt. I'm thankful I didn't break my hip and that I don't need surgery. She said: You know, as weird as it sounds, I'm thankful for this chance to have you three kids here together at the same time.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again Rejoice. The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything. Instead, pray and give thanks. Let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, this peace will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I don't know about you, but I have so much to be thankful for. I have so much to rejoice about. And yet I can let other things distract me or pull me away from giving thanks or from rejoicing. I can find plenty of reasons to mope around or feel sorry for myself.

It may not be an actual existential slap but maybe I'll just describe it as a Holy Slap, a convicting nudge saying: Don't you know you're a beloved child of God. Stand up and reclaim who God has created you to be. And as I begin to get on my feet, sometimes grudgingly... As I begin to reclaim that simple guy who is in the process of being transformed by Christ, I realize there are times I need to make conscious decisions to let my soul be refilled so I can reclaim a spirit of rejoicing and thanksgiving. Before I die, I want to take time to be grateful and to rejoice every day.

Joe McKeever writes: "There are just too many dead-serious Christians in the pews today. There's too little laughter. Too little spontaneous smiles"

What if, as worship winds down today, what if we make an intentional effort to rejoice and to give thanks? What if we make an intentional effort to smile at someone or to greet someone we might not otherwise know? What if, on the way out of worship, we make sure every person around us knows they're in the right place, right here this morning.

Rejoice in the Lord always. O say it again, Rejoice. The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything. Instead, pray and give thanks. Let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, this peace will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Before I die, I want to spend more time giving thanks and rejoicing every day.

Have you ever experienced the joy of someone thanking you for helping them meet Jesus or for walking with them deeper into a Spirit filled life?

Before I die, I want to spend more and more time helping people meet Jesus. I don't **EVER** want to cross that off my bucket list...

Or maybe it's your own walk with Jesus. Maybe on your own bucket list, you'd like to go deeper in faith. You'd like to walk more closely with Jesus.

Maybe it's been freeing for you to feel less greed because your grateful heart is growing. Maybe it's been joyful for you to pray instead of pouncing on someone. Maybe it's been uplifting for you to forgive instead of fostering resentment.

Have you ever sat in church and cringed at someone's critical spirit? Maybe they pride themselves on playing a devil's advocate. Did you know that the devil actually has enough advocates... so... how 'bout we advocate for Jesus instead?

Before I die, I want to spend more time being grateful and rejoicing. I want to spend more time advocating for Jesus.

I want to spend my time building people up instead of tearing them down. I want to spend more time redirecting negative taglines and critical voices. I want to spend more time being grateful and rejoicing because Jesus loves me, and even though I'm far from perfect, I want other people to know that Jesus loves them too.

Maybe we give thanks and rejoice because we're making progress paying down our debt. Maybe we're grateful and rejoicing because we're working to set up a church endowment or legacy gift for the church that will pay dividends well into the future. Maybe we give thanks and rejoice because we've learned a child's name, and we have a playful relationship with them before and after worship. Maybe we've had the opportunity to wash someone's feet, or we've gone beyond our comfort zones and met our neighbors in worship, people around us, we didn't previously know.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again, Rejoice. The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything. Instead, pray and give thanks. Let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, this peace will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Before I die, I want to live into the grateful realization that every one of us is a valued, beloved child of God. Before I die, I want to live into the joyful realization that the way I live today makes a difference not only in my own life, but also in the lives of the people around me. AND, before I die, I want to live into the joyful realization that the way I live today makes a difference not only in my own life, but it can also make a difference in the lives of people for generations to come.

Before we die, will you join me in trying to grow at finding reasons to rejoice and be thankful every day?

Let's pray...

Mighty and Merciful God, we come this morning fully immersed in life and all that that means. And yet we've come this morning to worship you. As people here, whether we're resting on a mountain top or whether we're feeling trapped in a prison, give us the strength and the courage to be grateful and to rejoice. I pray in the name of your Son, the one who gives us the ultimate reason to rejoice. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.