

## INTRODUCTION

A young man named John received a parrot as a gift. The parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary. Every word out of the bird's mouth was rude, obnoxious and his phrases were laced with profanity. John tried and tried to change the bird's attitude by consistently saying only polite words, playing soft music and anything else he could think of to "clean up" the bird's vocabulary. Finally, John was fed up and he yelled at the parrot. And the parrot yelled back. John shook the parrot and the parrot got angrier and even ruder. John, in desperation, grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer. For a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed. Then suddenly there was total quiet. Not a peep was heard for over a minute. Fearing that he'd seriously hurt the parrot or even worse, John quickly opened the door to the freezer. The parrot calmly stepped out onto John's outstretched arms and said "*I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions. I'm sincerely remorseful for my inappropriate transgressions and I fully intend to do everything I can to correct my rude and unforgivable behavior.*" John was stunned at the change in the bird's attitude. As he was about to ask the parrot about the dramatic change in his behavior, the bird continued, "*May I ask what the turkey did?*"

In two weeks we will celebrate Thanksgiving day and thousands, maybe millions of turkeys, didn't do anything to end up in the freezer, in the oven, on the dining room table and finally in the contented tummies of stuffed holiday diners---except it is our tradition and the poor turkey got in the way or in the middle of this yummy traditional feasting celebration.

The other part of the tradition, of course, is the underlying reason for turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing or dressing, sweet potatoes, cranberry relish, pumpkin pie—are you getting hungry yet? The underlying reason for this uniquely American holiday is our desire to **give thanks**—to show gratitude for the harvest, for the bounty, for the earth so sweet, for the food we eat—for all God's good gifts around us.

All things bright and beautiful,  
all creatures great and small,  
all things wise and wonderful:  
the Lord God made them all.

In our Bible passage today from the letter to the Colossians we read about Paul's *thanks-giving* sentiments. He tells his Colossian friends and fellow believers that he gives thanks for them...

We always **thank** God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, **4** because we have heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and of the **love** you have for all God's people—**5** the faith and love that spring from the **hope** stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel **6** that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

**When** does he give thanks for them and **why** does **he** give thanks?

**When**—“*when we pray for you.*” See verse 3.

**Why**—“*because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people.*” See verse 4.

Paul has been keep hearing these good reports about the Colossians. “We hear about your *faith* and your *love.*” And Paul continues, we know that your faith and your love spring from your *hope*—and that hope comes from the true message of the gospel.

Let’s reverse the sequence and see how Paul is reasoning.

**Gospel** message keeps bearing fruit; they have received it.

**Hope**—stored up in heaven, disclosed in the gospel story.  
Trusting in Christ has implications for the future!

**Faith** in Christ Jesus—springs from hope.

**Love** for all God’s people—springs from hope.

Our American thanksgiving holiday is food-focused and harvest--oriented. The Pilgrims and the early, early Virginia settlers at Berkeley Plantation were grateful for safety in a new home and for food to eat and the fruits of the harvest; in the words of the hymn, “*all is safely gathered in ere the winter storms begin.*”

The apostle Paul reminds us, however, that the reasons to be grateful are bigger and deeper than food eaten today and food stored for tomorrow. The Christian appreciation of Thanksgiving is not less than being grateful for our material blessings but it can be much more.

Paul writes to his Christian friends and he gives thanks for them. And we too give thanks for family and friends... Yes? Talked to my daughter yesterday.

And in particular Paul is thankful for his friends’ **faith** and **love** that springs from the hope of the gospel. The Colossians are in Christ, the only secure place to be. And they are showing love—they care for other brothers and sisters. Paul may have in mind their generous giving to others in need. He may remember acts of kindness he received or he has heard about...

I have remarked to friends in town how I admire Tuckahoe’s concern for caring. Having 24 deacons who concentrate on caring—that is an impressive way of ordering how these officers serve. And all of us may take time from day to day to listen to someone who needs a friendly and sympathetic ear. You might even have an opportunity today or in this season to tell someone about your faith in the Savior who loves you eternally and unconditionally.

I thank God for you today—for Tuckahoe Presbyterian Church—because I have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people...

The custom of having a big feast day for thanks-giving causes me to think about balancing BIG thanksgiving with little thanksgiving. What do I mean by little thanksgiving? Giving thanks on a daily basis—to God; and also saying thanks or showing appreciation to people we see from day to day.

Ralph Winter: “*Christianity that counts is daily Christianity...*” If your only expression of faith is limited to Sunday, you have missed something primary. What opportunities do you have to express *thanks* on a daily basis?

- Starbucks
- grocery clerks
- dry cleaning staff
- Mehdi* in Oxford, the grocery clerk

“*Simple Gifts*” is an 1848 Shaker song composed by Joseph Brackett. The Shakers began in 1747 as a small religious group first known as the *Shaking Quakers*. And the song seems to have been a dancing song.

The song became world famous thanks to its use in Aaron Copland's score for Martha Graham's ballet *Appalachian Spring*, first performed in 1944. Copland used "Simple Gifts" a second time in 1950 in his first set of *Old American Songs* for voice and piano, which was later orchestrated. Many people thought that the tune of "Simple Gifts" was a traditional Celtic one but both the music and original lyrics are actually the compositions of Joseph Brackett. "Simple Gifts" has been adapted or arranged many times by folksingers and composers. Probably the best-known example is by English songwriter Sydney Carter, who adapted the Shaker tune for his song "Lord of the Dance", first published in 1963.

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gain'd,  
To bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd,  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
Till by turning, turning we come round right.*

I do not know if the composer realized the weight of that word “*turning*.” In a dance it means one thing. In the Bible the word *turn* means to repent, change your mind; go in the right direction!

**Thanksgiving**, the American holiday, bids us set a day aside to appreciate our **simple gifts** and our **simple pleasures**. It’s a day for delighting in food and family and friends and fellowship. And it is a BIG day that reminds us to be thankful people all the rest of our little days.

From time to time we all need to turn again. To turn to Christ in faith, to turn to God in hope, to turn to neighbor and friend and family in love.

Friends, be especially grateful for Christian fellowship. For in Christ we are free, free to be people of faith, love and hope. Or people of faith, hope and love—and remember, the greatest of these is love.

Let us pray.