

On Thursday, most of us ate and ate, until our stomachs were full. When I woke Friday morning, my stomach didn't feel full anymore. In fact, Thanksgiving leftovers made for a tasty breakfast Friday morning, but by Friday night I was hungry again.

Thanksgiving isn't about celebrating full stomachs that feel empty again on Friday; it's about celebrating full hearts that stay full on Friday and beyond. I want to encourage you. I want your hearts to feel full - full of Thanksgiving.

I want to encourage you to be thankful for this: You all have people in your life who are thankful for you. Think about it. Who comes to mind when you think of people who are thankful for you? Someone in your life is thankful to listen to you, to love you, and pray for you.

To the parents and grandparents, and you who lead in our CPCKids and Student Ministries, who are faithfully present each week to partner with our families, be thankful because God has given you an opportunity to impact what is so important to God: The next generation who follows you. Thank God he has given you the collective life experience and will use the good, the bad, and the struggles in your life to bring wisdom and share with the generation that follows you.

If you have felt full in your stomach these past few days but not so full in your heart, we have a story that I pray will make you feel full in your heart.

**When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. Luke 7: 36-37**

A Pharisee was a person who was very religious. They saw themselves as special, set apart from others because of all the religious rules they followed. During Jesus' time on earth, he and the Pharisees didn't get along well. It was because Jesus kept pointing out that they could say the right thing and keep lots of rules but their hearts were not filled with thankfulness to God. In fact, God said through the prophet Isaiah that, "these people come near me and even honor me with their words, but their hearts are far from me." Since the Pharisees and Jesus didn't get along, why did this Pharisee invite Jesus over for dinner? Maybe he recognized that his heart needed to be filled up. We don't know the reason. What we do know is it was prestigious for Pharisees to entertain important guests who visited their town.

It was also normal to invite some of their own religious friends to come and spend time with Jesus, and to leave the door to their house open so interested people could slip in and sit around the edges of the table to listen in on the conversation. We don't know much about the woman, but what we do know is she had done things that were bad, and the town knew she had lived a sinful life. We don't know her sin, but it probably more than a bunch of unpaid parking tickets.

A woman like this was not on the invitation list for this Pharisee's dinner party. So, picture the scene. Jesus and the other dinner party guests didn't sit in chairs to eat. They reclined on the floor on pillows on their left sides with their feet facing away. They would prop themselves up on their left elbows and reach for the food and eat with their right hands. Then the woman came into the house.

**As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. v. 38**

She wept. Why was she weeping? Because she realized there was something about Jesus that was different from the Pharisees. She didn't feel judged around Jesus, he knew her heart and loved her anyway. She didn't feel ashamed; she felt safe. She didn't feel condemned; she felt his mercy and willingness to forgive. In other words, in the presence of Jesus, her heart was filled, and the tears she shed were tears of joy. God loved her, and her heart was full of thanksgiving. She wept, and her tears fell onto Jesus' feet. She wiped the tears on his feet with her hair. Then she kissed his feet.

By this time, I don't think anyone around the table was asking for more stuffing or cranberry sauce. They were not eating. They were not speaking. They just watched Jesus and the woman. They were shocked by the behavior of the sinful woman, and they were shocked at Jesus response. He didn't stop the woman. He seemed comfortable with her public affection. Then she broke a small jar of perfume and poured it on his feet, massaging the perfume into his feet.

**When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." v. 39**

The Pharisee said to himself there is no way this Jesus could be who he or others say he is because he wouldn't let a woman like this do this touch him.

**Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said. v. 40**

Did you notice this? He knew what he was thinking. So he said to the Pharisee,

**“Two people owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred denarii,[c] and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” vv. 41-42**

Both people owed money. One owed something like two months wages, and the other owed about 18 months wages. They fell on hard times and couldn't repay the one who loaned them money. They went to the money lender, and he gave the most incredible response. Remember when a moneylender forgives the debt, he has to bear the cost himself. That's the essence of forgiveness. Forgiveness is saying, "I no longer hold you responsible and I will assume the loss myself. Let's see if Simon understands.

**Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said. v. 43**

Way to go Simon! Then Jesus said, "Let me point something out to you."

**Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. vv. 44-45**

**You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”vv. 46-47**

**Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” vv. 48-50**

In other words, as we might say, "You didn't come to the door, you didn't shake my hand, and you didn't show me where I could hang my coat and freshen up, you didn't offer me something to drink. Simon, do you get the point? This woman made a demonstrative, and expressive exhibition of love. I didn't see anything from you, Simon. Yet you criticize her? Simon, has it ever dawned on you, that if you really understood the gift of forgiveness that comes from God, you would have been filled with thanksgiving and gratitude and love just as she is? This sinful woman understands the heart of God better than you do. Could the reason you express so little love for me is because you have little grasp of your own need for God's forgiveness?

Jesus turns to the woman and says, "Woman, I want you to know something, your faith has saved you. Your sins are forgiven. I want you to go away in peace. I also want you to know that I appreciate your expressions of thanksgiving."

There are some hard lessons for us to learn from this story. What was it that Simon didn't grasp that many of us have a hard time grasping? Simon and many of us live our lives according to socially acceptable norms. We go to school, we do our homework, we stay out of detention, we do our jobs, and we pay our bills, but it doesn't mean we are right with God.

I think most of us find volcanoes interesting. Volcanoes are mountains full of molten lava that are covered with a crust. Sometimes the crust is strong, and we think the molten lava is kept deep inside and out of sight. But sometimes cracks form in the crust, and the molten lava flows out. That's a volcano erupting.

We are like volcanoes. There is a molten mass called sin in all of us. On the outside, there is a crust, and with most of us, the thick crust hides the molten lava deep inside. Our sin, our lava, is our attitude against God. Simon looked great on the outside because his crust was thick. The woman didn't look so great, and her crust had cracks, and her sin was leaking out all over the place.

But when we are confronted by God something true and real flows out. For Simon and for many of us, what flows out is a feeling of superiority over others, an unloving attitude, and a prideful I-can-run-my-own-life-I-don't-need-God-to-direct-me attitude. There is a nice, polite appearance but inside there is disobedience to what God desires from us.

We can learn from this story that the woman needed forgiveness, the polite Simon needed forgiveness, and you and I need forgiveness. We all have a molten lava of sinful attitude towards God that needs to be forgiven.

Another lesson for us is that Jesus Christ is prepared to forgive our sin whether it's hidden sin or leaking out sin. He is prepared to forgive people who can't repay him, by taking the debt of the sin on himself.

We can learn from this story that those whose sins are forgiven are commanded to go in peace. We are commanded to go away from our experience of forgiveness with the great load of guilt and shame lifted from our shoulders. When we understand God's gracious forgiveness in Jesus Christ, there will be a tremendous upsurge of gratitude that will express itself in generous and extravagant ways.

If I don't understand my need for God's forgiveness, my spiritual life is one of an outsider in the cold, unable to get to the warmth inside. I may look proper to others, but I will lack passion for Jesus. I may be religious, but I will lack a drive for a relationship with Jesus. I may think theologically, but I will lack reasons to be thankful. I may feel fine when trouble is far away, but I will

lack the faith that he is my refuge and strength and help in times when trouble is near.

I want to fill your hearts with reasons to be thankful today. You may be in the same tough place today with the same set of tough circumstances that you had before you ate turkey on Thanksgiving. But please get this: Thankfulness opens our hearts to God's presence. Becoming thankful is as if a light is switched on, enabling us to see our tough place from God's perspective. Being thankful removes the sting. Being thankful fills our hearts.

Thankful people do not deny the reality of the hardness of life. The circumstances in our lives before our Thanksgiving Holiday will likely be the same after our Thanksgiving Holiday. But thankful people can be thankful in the middle of difficult circumstances. Psalm 46: 1-3 encouraged me this week.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. [

When you are not feeling thankful, I want you to think about something. It's called a Box of Thanks. Inside the box are five things you can think about when you are not feeling thankful.

So, what's in my Box of Thanks?

First is a little gift bag. It's a gift bag addressed to me from Jesus and in it is a cross, which I hang in my office. Julie and I collect crosses. We collect empty crosses. We are thankful because a cross which was meant for suffering and death, God used to remove from us from the suffering and death we deserve and instead placed it on Jesus, God's Son. He died for our sins on a cross. Jesus died and was buried. We can be thankful that the cross is empty and Jesus is risen from the dead, and has triumphed over the grave.

No matter how unthankful you may feel this next week, remember the empty cross I hang in my office.

#### **Be Thankful; God has promised GRACE TO YOU**

**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift from God – Ephesians 2:8**

What else is in my Box of Thanksgiving? A map. Why would I be thankful for a map? Because a map has a starting place and a destination, then it provides a road to get to the destination. Do you know why you can be thankful when you look at a map? Because it can remind you God has a good plan for your life. He has mapped out your entire journey. He knows every road you will travel, whether it will be bumpy, smooth, or full of sharp turns. He has it mapped out.

And what do you know about God's plan for you? Maybe you don't know very much right now. But here is what you do know,

God is the navigator, and his plan is good. No matter how much you can't see, no matter how unsure you are about the what the plan is, He says, "trust me and take the next step." Take a step and follow me today, and tomorrow trust me and take another step to follow me again. He says trust me and be obedient to me today, and tomorrow trust me again and be obedient to me again.

No matter how unthankful you may feel this next week, remember the roadmap.

#### **Be Thankful; God has brought PLANS FOR YOU**

**For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11**

When you are feeling weak, lacking the courage to be thankful, I want you to remember a can of salt. Why? What is the reason we keep salt in our kitchens? Salt changes our food and makes it taste better. In the same way, you can be thankful God is making changes in you that you couldn't do on your own. Be thankful you are not the person you used to be, and today you are not the person you will become in the future. He chips away the waste. He burns away impurities. And He flavors what has been dull. He loves us far too much to let us stay just the way we are. No matter how unthankful you may feel this next week, remember Salt.

#### **Be Thankful; God has brought CHANGE IN YOU**

**...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Philippians 2:13**

I am thankful for my vintage 1960's San Francisco Giants cap. My grandmother gave me this hat when I was eight years old. She lived in San Francisco and went to a lot of Giants games. This hat reminds me of family and home. Now my Grandmother is in heaven. She is home. And one day I will be in heaven with her. Heaven is my home. No matter how unthankful you may feel this next week, remember my grandmother in heaven and her Giants Cap.

#### **Be Thankful; God has brought HEAVEN FOR YOU**

**For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. 2 Corinthians 5:1**

My box of thanks has an empty cross (grace), a roadmap (a plan), a can of salt (change) and a Giants cap (Heaven will be my home where I will see many of my family again).

And the last thing in my box of thanks is an old worn shoe. I was recently with a family who had gone through a very difficult almost unbearable ordeal. They were so thankful that they had others who loved them and walked beside them. They shared that they wouldn't have made it without their CPC family and

friends. No matter how unthankful you may feel this next week, remember my shoe.

**Be Thankful; God has brought OTHERS TO WALK BESIDE YOU**

**Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2**

**Be thankful; God has brought grace to you, change in you, heaven for you, and others to walk beside you.**

For our 30th wedding anniversary, a couple of years ago, Julie and I celebrated on the island of Maui. It was awesome. We actually stayed in the same hotel that we stayed at on our honeymoon 30 years before. One day, we were walking through a little shopping area, and I saw a bunch of T-shirts that had the logo "LIFE IS GOOD." My first thought was of course life is good. You live and work on Maui.

Later, I read an article on the LIFE IS GOOD T-shirt company. It was co-founded by two brothers, Bert and John Jacobs. Did you know it's a \$100 million-dollar company now?

Bert and John Jacobs grew up the youngest of six children in a lower middle-class family in Boston. When the brothers were in elementary school, their parents were in a near-death car accident from which their mother managed to escape with just a few broken bones, but their father lost the use of his right hand.

The stress and frustration from his physical therapy caused him to develop a harsh temper. In their book, Life is Good, the brothers wrote, "He did a lot of yelling when we were in grade school. And life certainly wasn't perfect. There were often difficult things happening around the house."

But their mom, Joan, still believed "life was good." So, every night as the family sat around the dinner table, she would ask her six kids to tell her something good that happened that day. "As simple as mom's words were, they changed the energy in the room," the brothers wrote. "Before we knew it, we were all riffing on the best, funniest, or most bizarre part of our day."

Growing up with a mother like theirs, no matter what bad situation they were going through—taught them an important lesson: Being thankful isn't dependent on your circumstances. They wrote, "She showed us that being thankful is a courageous choice you can make every day, especially in the face of adversity."

Are we feeling full this Thanksgiving? May God give you your own Box of Thanks to open every day. And from this day forward, may you see your tough circumstances from God's perspective. May God open your heart to his presence and the work he is doing behind the scenes in your life, as he works out all things for His good and His glory.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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