

In All Things Be Thankful

Text: Ephesians 4:14-5:20

The most intense moments of thankfulness are not found in times of plenty, but when difficulties abound. Think of the Pilgrims that first Thanksgiving. Half their number dead, men without a country, but still there was thanksgiving to God. Their gratitude was not for something but in something. It was that same sense of gratitude that lead Abraham Lincoln to formally establish the first Thanksgiving Day in the midst of national civil war, when the butcher's list of casualties seemed to have no end and the very nation struggled for survival. - eSermons.com

Perhaps in your own life, right now, intense hardship. You are experiencing your own personal Great Depression. Why should you be thankful this day? May I suggest three things?

I. WE MUST LEARN TO BE THANKFUL OR WE BECOME BITTER.

A. Disappointment breeds bitterness.

B. Bitterness hardens the heart.

II. WE MUST LEARN TO BE THANKFUL OR WE WILL BECOME DISCOURAGED.

A. A lack of gratitude leaves a person feeling downcast.

B. A person who is downcast embraces doubt and will let go of hope.

III. WE MUST LEARN TO BE THANKFUL OR WE WILL GROW ARROGANT AND SELF-SATISFIED.

A. A lack of thankfulness reveals a heart that dismisses the contribution of others and of God to our lives.

B. A heart that dismisses the contributions of others and of God is a lonely heart.

Conclusion

It is gratitude that prompted an old man to visit an old broken pier on the eastern seacoast of Florida. Every Friday night, until his death in 1973, he would return, walking slowly and slightly stooped with a large bucket of shrimp. The sea gulls would flock to this old man, and he would feed them from his bucket.

Many years before, in October, 1942, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was on a mission in a B-17 to deliver an important message to General Douglas MacArthur in New Guinea. But there was an unexpected detour which would hurl Captain Eddie into the most harrowing adventure of his life. Somewhere over the South Pacific the Flying Fortress became lost beyond the reach of radio. Fuel ran dangerously low, so the men ditched their plane in the ocean...For nearly a month Captian Eddie and his companions would fight the water, and the weather, and the scorching sun. They spent many sleepless nights recoiling as giant sharks rammed their rafts. The largest raft was nine by five. The biggest shark...ten feet long.

But of all their enemies at sea, one proved most formidable: starvation. Eight days out, their rations were long gone or destroyed by the salt water. It would take a miracle to sustain them. And a miracle occurred. In Captain Eddie's own words, "Cherry," that was the B-17 pilot, Captain William Cherry, "read the service that afternoon, and we finished with a prayer for deliverance and a hymn of praise. There was some talk, but it tapered off in the oppressive heat. With my hat pulled down over my eyes to keep out some of the glare, I dozed off."

Now this is still Captian Rickenbacker talking..."Something landed on my head. I knew that it was a sea gull. I don't know how I knew, I just knew. Everyone else knew too. No one said a word, but peering out from under my hat brim without moving my head, I could see the expression on their faces. They were staring at that gull.

The gull meant food...if I could catch it." And the rest, as they say, is history. Captain Eddie caught the gull. Its flesh was eaten. Its intestines were used for bait to catch fish. The survivors were sustained and their hopes renewed because a lone sea gull, uncharacteristically hundreds of miles from land, offered itself as a sacrifice. You know that Captain Eddie made it.

And now you also know...that he never forgot. Because every Friday evening, about sunset...on a lonely stretch along the eastern Florida seacoast...you could see an old man walking...white-haired, bushy-eyebrowed, slightly bent. His bucket filled with shrimp was to feed the gulls...to remember that one which, on a day long past, gave itself without a struggle...like manna in the wilderness.

Paul Harvey's [The Rest of the Story "The Old Man and the Gulls" 1977](#), quoted in Knofel Stanton, [Heaven Bound Living](#), Standard, 1989, p. 79-80.
