

112121 "Grateful Life" 3 John 1:2

Happy Thanksgiving! Thanksgiving is one of those holidays that gives us opportunity to look back in gratitude for all of God's Grace of the past year. The year of 2021 has been a tough year in many ways for us. Some of us may have struggled with loneliness, fatigue from the toil and fight of trying to stand tall by yourself. We might have failed at things we tried hard at, and I am sure tears have been shed in the secret of a private moment. And of course, the sighs and thirsts that are inevitably coupled with the gratitude of loving and raising children. But there's a saying. "The greatest misfortune is not 'thirst', but 'dryness' which does not generate a grateful heart." I hope you may look at this year to see if you have not been answering with dryness to God's grace, and strive to live each day with thanksgiving and in service to our God for the rest of our lives.

102 Puritans from England left for America for religious freedom. This was in 1620, so it's 401 years ago. But soon after their arrival, more than half of them died from starvation and diseases. Even those who survived suffered a lot. Then, they began fasting and prayed to God. Countless times, they fasted and prayed.

One day, another difficulty came, and people thought they should fast again. But a farmer suggested, "So far we asked for God's help by fasting. But I want us to think differently. I think we still have things to be grateful for despite the bad crops and diseases. Although we don't have food and comfort as abundantly as we did in Europe, we have religious and political freedom. In addition, we have a vast land before us. What if we set a time for thanksgiving, instead of fasting?" His speech deeply resonated with those who were there. So this time, they declared a time of thanksgiving. If we give thanks in a time

when fasting is called for, such thanksgiving will bring miracle. This is the origin of Thanksgiving. I heard the moving story of the Puritans cutting down logs and building first churches, then schools, and then their houses.

People often say Christianity is a religion of thankfulness. It does not work without the cross of Jesus, and it does not work without thankfulness.

Thankfulness is not simply an ethical value; it is the core of Christianity.

Throughout the Bible, the scriptures speak of giving thanks for God's presence, Grace, and salvation. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

The Old Testament uses the verb *yadah* and the noun *todah*, with the meaning "to thank." These words also have the meaning, "the fountain of the heart." On the other hand, the New Testament uses *eucharistia* and *charis*, with the meaning "to think." To give thanks we need to think. When we dwell deeply on the meaning of life in God, we naturally become grateful.

Let's have a look at today's passage, the third John chapter 1 verse 2, "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well."

Today's Bible verse speaks of a good life. How does one have a good life? Get rich, buy a big house and a luxury car, trample on others to become the receiver of their envy? We always tend to want our physical problems to be solved first. People think only when the problems of family and business are solved, then the problem of the soul can be considered, right? However, Jesus said, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteous and all these things shall be given unto you." In today's passage the well-being of the soul is also introduced as first priority. I pray that your soul receives first priority in your life.

As I said last week, I was called to be a pastor when I was a freshman in high school. With such an inflated dream, I entered Methodist Theological University in South Korea. I thought how holy was a seminary because holy people gathered for a higher calling. But the reality was not like that. During the second semester of the first year, due to campus protest against corruption in churches and some famous pastors, 1,000 students from all grades were delayed for one semester due to insufficient number of school days.

I saw a lot of political pastors, seminary professors and staff, students and church members fighting each other almost for three years, and I was very disappointed. As I began to complain more and more of others, my gratitude was fading away and problems were accumulating in my spirit. The continuing campus protest was very serious. Because of this, many seminary students gave up on this path. 'How can a church do that?' 'How can a pastor do that?' 'How can a seminary professor do that?' 'How can Christians do that?' I was so exhausted and I almost decided to give it up.

Then I prayed, complaining to God, how could this be? Even if seminarians continue to learn, it will not be enough, but what is this? I gave up my dream of becoming a NASA scientist and came this far, what is this for? At that time, it was as if God said, 'I no longer exist.' I prayed or complained to God, saying, 'If God doesn't show me that God is alive, I won't come back to the seminary again.' After I finished the first semester of my junior year, I went to the army.

I enlisted with such a complicated mind. I served in the military at the United Nation Command Security Battalion, the Joint Security Area – Panmunjom, and there were many times in the army where I thought that I might really die doing this. Panmunjom is the closest unit to the North Korean army. The sound of grenades, rifles, and pistols was unstoppable and North Korean propaganda

broadcasts were very loud. One of my military mates was stunned after being hit by a back-kick by a recruiting instructor for being stupid. I was assigned to headquarters company, and there was a private not good at push-ups, so a corporal stepped on him and broke his arm and was wearing a cast. The Korean military has changed a lot now, but when I was in the military, there were many incidents. Because of all these things, I began to cling to God earnestly. I recited the Bible verses dozens of times a day. "Do not be afraid, for I am with you..." My complaint, "God, how could you do this to me?" has turned into a prayer, "Oh God, please save me! Help me to be discharged as a one-piece without getting hurt."

And I said I would not go back to the seminary if God didn't show me God was alive, but the situation became even more extreme, so I started to see God again. As God began to appear in my life, I began to see that I had only seen problems and all that was complaining and dissatisfaction with. Then a change occurred in my life, and that change was nothing other than a recovery of gratitude. "Thank you, Lord. I saw the world, I saw other people, and there was no satisfaction there. I didn't really see what my soul was like and forgot the fact that you're with me. Thank you Lord for being with me."

"Thank you Lord" written and composed by Dan Burgess.

1. Thank You Lord for the trials that come my way
in that way I can grow each day as I let You lead
and thank you Lord for the patience those trials bring
in that process of growing, I can learn to care

[Chorus]

But it goes against the way I am to put my human nature down
and let the spirit take control of all I do

For when those trials come my human nature shouts the things to do

and God's soft prompting can be easily ignored

Since then, I try not to lose my gratitude under any circumstances. Sometimes when my life is overwhelming, I take a deep breath and pray like this. "Thank you, Lord!" Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

God finally revived my weary soul, led me to green pastures, and made me confess that God IS with me and God cares for me. The experiences I had at the Panmunjom Unit were very helpful. There were many challenges, but God answered my humble prayer and helped me to be discharged in one piece without getting hurt.

It wasn't just that. That experience became the driving force for me to try something that others haven't tried even after being discharged. I got a near perfect score on my study abroad test and was admitted to Yale Divinity School. There has never been a case where I completed my undergraduate degree at Methodist Theological University and went straight to Yale University's master's program before, and there has never been a case after me. It was a miracle from God given through a life of gratitude.

What does it mean to be well in the Third Epistle of John? Today's passage uses the Greek compound word made of *yoo* meaning "well or good" and *hodos* meaning "road". A good travel, to lead towards the good direction. Basically, it means to be led towards a good road, to have a good travel. To have a good travel means to follow the road that the Good Shepherd, our God leads us through just like the 23rd Psalm says. It means to keep a good and continuous relationship with God.

There is a lot of hurt in the world. It can even seem at times that our world is out of control, because of the virus, or political divisions and vitriol, or the troubling issues we deal with in our lives. However, I know that God will show us the way and lead us. God's goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. For this, check whether the gratitude towards God has dried up in your life or not. Let us thank God for being with us until the day we stand before the Lord face to face. Fairfield Grace, May God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.