

THANKSMAS OR CHRISTGIVING?

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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Pastor Michael McCall

“Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving and God’s courts with praise...” Psalm 100:4

Is it still Thanksgiving – or is it now the Christmas season? The answer is...BOTH. Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend is often the First Sunday in Advent. It is just like God to fill our hearts with gratitude as we enter the season of giving. And I don’t mean giving as in buying and buying, but giving as in giving God praise and giving loved ones love. We know we have been blessed to bless. We know we forgive because we have been forgiven. We know we love because God first loved us. And we give because **“God so loved the world that God gave His Son.”** (John 3:16) God giving Jesus is what Christmas is about. We give because God gave. Our passage, Luke 2:8-12,15-18,20

“There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger....When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”

The Angels give the Shepherds the good news of God giving this world a Savior – and the Shepherds give Jesus their attention and give their friends their witness and give God their glory and praise. But giving at Christmas has been secularized to the point that Jesus has been left out of it. I want us to remember what Christmas is all about. To “remember” is something God continually challenges His people to do. Jesus gave us Communion and said **“Do this in remembrance of me”**. God gave the Jews a way to remember by tassels on their clothing. Numbers 15:39 says **“The tassels will remind you of the commands of the Lord and that you are to obey his commands instead of following your own desires and going your own ways as you are prone to do.”** Prone to forget. God isn’t talking about senior moments here. In the busyness of life – especially the busyness of Christmas, we forget – yet our faith is strengthened by remembering. There are things which we must remember.

This message is to help you to remember Christ this Christmas season...and always. It is very easy...very practical...but I need for each of you to have some coins in your hand. You need at least two. Reach in your pockets or purses, share with the people around you...or take from the plates we are passing. That’s right, FROM the plates. Some of you are thinking, “Wait a second! This is not how we normally do church.” It’s like a reverse offering. You take something *out* of the plate. Who doesn’t have at least two coins? Ok. They all say “In God We Trust.”

I’m going to start with **the PENNY for PENNY-PAST**. When you see a penny this Christmas season, you’re going to celebrate your past. But not just your past, you are going to remember that your past has been forgiven. There is no past that Jesus can’t forgive. Some of you need to hear that...because I keep hearing your guilt and pain of the past. The name “Jesus” literally means “God saves”...this is why Christ came...we all need to remember that we are forgiven and freed from all that would entrap us from the past. Penny-past. Got it? Good.

The NICKEL reminds of us of NOW and “IN”. “N” the present “God is with us”...“Emmanuel”. We remember and celebrate that when we said “yes” to Jesus and invited Him into our heart... Jesus came “N”! And God’s Spirit lives “N” us right now. We do not go through life alone. Personally I believe most of the mess we get into in our lives is because we forget that God’s Spirit resides in us...enabling us and empowering us to be who God created us to be. We even forget that Christ is in us and that we are in Christ. This is why we are called “Christ-iaNs”! Nickel, now “N” us.

The DIME is for Determined In My Eternity. We remember this Christmas season that our future is in heaven. Those angels are singing our school’s song! C.S. Lewis said “The Son of God became human so that humans could become children on God”. This is why Christ came...to deal with our past, to be with us in the present, and to usher us into eternity - this is why we celebrate Christmas. May the dime remind us, as Christians, that I am Determined in My Eternity.

The QUARTER is for Spiritual Growth. Some of you are thinking, “Where’s the Q word? How am I going to remember and celebrate if there isn’t a Q word?” It’s not as easy to remember, but the quarter is going to remind you of Spiritual Growth. Here is how: Jesus told a story about a farmer who plants seed and of the seed only one quarter of that seed grew. Only ONE QUARTER GREW. Seventy-five percent didn’t grow. This Christmas we celebrate that growth. That growth means that we can change. Matthew 13:3-8 says **“As he scattered the seed some of it fell on the road, and the birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel and it sprouted quickly but it didn’t put roots down, so the sun came up and it withered away just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds. As it came up it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good soil (that is us...that is YOUR heart) and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.”** ONE QUARTER GREW beyond his wildest dreams. How many can remember that? It’s a little tougher to remember, but it is worthy to celebrate. We don’t have to be the same. Jesus came that we might have life...abundant!

Because of Christmas, we have so much to be thankful for – and to remember – and to celebrate. Not just December 25th, but 24/7/365! Dream with me just for a second. . . What would your life look like if you were to go through life constantly remembering and celebrating? That every time you saw a penny, you said, “Thank you, God, that my past is forgiven!” That when you saw a nickel you were reminded that God’s Spirit is N you now. That every dime reminded you of heaven...and that “Determined Is My Eternity.” That every quarter reminded you that God’s Word has taken root in your heart and that God intends for you to spiritually grow and grow. What would your life be like if you constantly remembered these things? I think: your life would be better, your faith would be stronger, your struggles lighter, your perspective brighter, your attitude more positive, your purpose clearer, your relationships deeper. Let me give one more trigger for your memory: take those coins in your hand and shake your hand. What do you hear? Jingle bells. Joyous celebration of Christ. Hear...and remember...and give thanks...and praise.