

May 13, 2021

Texts: Psalm 47; Ephesians 1: 15-23

Title: “How Could We Forget?”

Here’s a question to think about. What are you most likely to forget in the course of a day or a week? All of us forget something on a fairly regular basis. Some people forget the names of people they just met. That’s awkward. Some people are famous for forgetting where they put their glasses—even when those glasses are on the top of their head. Can you relate?

Cell phones, shoes, car keys, passwords—what are you most likely to forget? And why do we so easily forget things that are important to us? One reason, I think, is that we’re not living in the moment. Our mind is someplace else. We are rushed, stressed, distracted. And so . . . we forget.

Back before COVID when air travel was at its busiest, the TSA reported that air travelers left behind about \$1 million each year in loose change at airport security bins. A million dollars! A TSA spokesperson says that security checkpoints can be stressful and distracting, and people forget to take that last look around and make sure they got everything. And that little lapse in focus adds up to \$1 million a year.

One of my favorite subjects is the power of gratitude, of thanksgiving. Charles Dickens is quoted as saying that rather than have a holiday devoted to thanksgiving, Americans should set aside one day each year to complain. And then he said, “Use the other 364 days to thank God each day for the many blessings He has showered upon you.”

I think we'd all agree with him on that. But why don't we do it? How could we forget something so important? I guess it happens for the same reasons that we forget other things. We're hurried, distracted and stressed. Our mind is someplace else. And so we forget the incredible blessing of being alive, of having a sense of hope, of having people who love us, a roof over our heads—incredible blessings. How could we possibly forget?

I read of one person who had reached a really low point in his life but in the midst of his tough circumstances, an idea came to him. He would write one thank-you note every day for a whole year. This was his way of forcing himself to notice something positive in his life. Over the course of a year, he wrote thank yous to family, friends, colleagues, former bosses, teachers, community leaders and first responders.

It changed his life! His relationships improved. He left his negative mindset behind. He began to notice dozens of reasons each day to be thankful. And as he caught on to this gratitude thing, he became a lot more joyful and hopeful.

The Apostle Paul may not have written 365 thank-you notes. But he wrote many of the letters that make up the New Testament. And they overflow with thanksgiving! No matter what problem he had to deal with, Paul's letters, like the one we read from today, were filled with thankfulness. And so they overflow with joy too. Because thankfulness and joy go together like peanut butter and jelly. Today's Bible passage gives us a great example of heartfelt gratitude put into action.

Paul was thankful for the faith and love of his fellow believers. (next slide) In fact he was so thrilled by it that he wrote, “I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers” (v 16).

“I have not stopped giving thanks for you . . .” He was inspired by their faith in Jesus and encouraged by their love for one another. The Ephesians were living proof of the truth of the gospel. Are you thankful for your church?

Stop and think for a moment about how amazing the church is. We are brothers and sisters with people of every nation, language, culture and race all over the world who also claim Jesus as Lord. We have an instant family of people who live under the command to love each other as much as Jesus loves them. Yes, we are all hypocrites. None of us lives up to Jesus’ example all the time. But you walk into any Christian church in this world and ask people the question, “How has your church family shown its love for you?” and you will get story after story of people whose lives were changed by that love and encouragement.

The first confirmed case of COVID in the state of Tennessee was diagnosed in a man named Chris Baumgartner. Chris and his family had fears that people would find out that he had it and that would be shunned or harassed, like lepers in Jesus’ day. Instead, when he posted his diagnosis on social media, he was stunned by the outpouring of love and support. People brought them meals. They sent cards and texts. Their phone was ringing off the hook. In his Facebook post, Chris wrote, “Every single act of kindness, every single message, every single call we’ve

received, have all ended with the same 5 words: We are praying for you! *All of them!*” Baumgartner ended his post with the hashtag #bethechurch. Faith in action means love in action. So much to be thankful for.

Paul put his thankfulness into action by praying regularly for all of his churches. How often do you pray for your church? Paul didn’t take the church for granted. He made it a point to regularly pray that God would bless the church in Ephesus. And what was the greatest blessing he could pray for? That they would come to know God better. Because as we grow in our knowledge of God, we grow in our level of love, joy, faith, hope, peace.

Something happens when we pray regularly for the church. Our unity with others grows. When we pray for the church, we start to see more opportunities where we can serve others. When we pray for the church, God can work all sorts of positive changes in our church. But more importantly, God can work positive changes in us. Prayer changes us so we can be his agents to bless others.

If we choose, we can make every day Thanksgiving Day. Make a choice to live in this moment. Notice the many blessings that you normally take for granted. Thank God that you are surrounded by other believers who share your hope and your joy. Put your thankfulness into action by praying for your church and that others would become thankful for the gift of God’s love through Jesus Christ. Amen.