

## Thankful for the Journey

### 3rd Sunday of Advent – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, December 14, 2014*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

If you've been here the last couple of weeks, you have noticed by now that we are in the season of Advent, our journey to the annual celebration of the Incarnation, Eternal God become one of us, *and* the Church's reminder that we are all on another journey – to the end of our days and of time itself. And you *also* know that I have not been able to resist thinking about *that* journey in light of the journey I completed just *before* the First Sunday of Advent, my rolling retreat courtesy of our nation's Interstate Highway system and the good folks at Greyhound Bus Lines. Even many of you that considered me just about out of my mind to undertake such a thing, have nonetheless encouraged me to share stories of my journey, which is a good thing since I very much like *telling* stories, and trying to make sense of my own larger journey *and*, I hope, the road we are on together.

“Rejoice always,” Paul told the Thessalonians, “pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.” “Give thanks in all circumstances,” Paul said. But sometimes we're not all that good at giving thanks, even in pretty *basic* circumstances.

Since my last such retreat four years ago, Greyhound has rolled out a whole new line of busses. Technically they *had* started fielding the new fleet before 2010, but *I* didn't get to experience any of the new coaches during that fifteen day trip. As I hinted at last week, these days nearly every seat on a bus is equipped with a power outlet to plug in all the devices we carry on our persons 24/7, and every bus is equipped with Wi-Fi, to keep all those devices humming. That does not mean, however, that the Wi-Fi always works as well as it would in most people's home or office. One of the characters I got to know on the bus, a fellow by the name of Tommy, was particularly critical of the onboard Wi-Fi. Rather than sharing my amazement that a bus could even *manage* a computer connection to the rest of the world, Tommy seemed quite upset that he could not watch the latest episodes of the *Netflix* series *Orange is the New Black* while hurling down the road at (or near) Interstate speeds. I know because I got to hear about his discontent until he got off in Denver.

Or how about the lady who almost literally griped all the way from Sacramento to Reno? I never learned her name, and I hope you will forgive me, but I never really *wanted* to. Traveling alone, she hauled herself aboard the bus griping about the pitch of the boarding steps. She was angry that she had to check her full-sized suitcase because the driver would not let her haul it aboard. She couldn't get the overhead fan adjusted to her liking. The driver was going too slow up the mountain passes, and he was going way too *fast* down the other side. It was too cold. And then it was too warm. And then her footrest wasn't working properly – she must have ratcheted that thing up and down fifty times. For pity's sake, she complained out loud when we went around a curve and the sun setting over a postcard view of California vineyards caught her eyes at a “totally unacceptable” angle. During that two-and-a-half hour stretch, I got the impression that grumbling was just the way she interacted with the world.

Along with roughly half the population of Jackson County, it seemed, Brenda and her three kids, Malisha, Leslie and Gemini joined schedule 1684 in Kansas City. Teen-aged Malisha found an open seat somewhere nearer the back of the bus, while Brenda and the boys, four- and two-years-old, piled into the two seats across the aisle from me. I lost my second seat, you might remember, to Daryl who you met last week, and a guy my age named Ron took the seat right in front of *him*. Like I said, it got real *crowded* on that leg of the trip, so you'd expect folks to not be at their best, but Ron was having a particular problem. “I can't believe I *paid* for a seat on this cattle car,” he said, shortly after he stuffed *two* bags into the

overhead rack and made a show of “squeezing” into his seat. He didn’t much care for the restlessness of Brenda’s little ones, either. “I’ve already raised my children,” he muttered, just loud enough for Brenda to hear. “I don’t see why I have to help raise someone else’s.” He was *really* displeased when Daryl got off in Columbia, and I invited Brenda to let four-and-a-half-year-old Leslie have a seat of his own – right behind Ron.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,” Paul told the Thessalonians, “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for *you*.” “Give thanks in all circumstances,” Paul said. But sometimes we’re not all that good at giving thanks, even in pretty *basic* circumstances.

One of the problems we have is that we just aren’t paying attention. Someone once said that if the stars only came out once a year, we would stay out all night to watch them. Instead, we grow accustomed to things that *should* be wonderful, and we just kind of... *forget* to be thankful.

Or we fall into a *habit* of worrying and complaining, always finding fault with *something*, until that just kind of crusts over any thankfulness we may have left. Over time, gratefulness is essentially *consumed* by grumbling, until, as C. S. Lewis put it, the *grumbler* becomes nothing more substantial than the *grumble* itself.

And then, of course, there’s the same old sin that has plagued humankind since Chapter Three. “Nobody ever *gave* me anything,” we say, “I’ve *earned* everything I have.” It’s hard to give thanks, isn’t it, for what you think you got *for yourself* in the first place, what you think you have a right to, what you think others, or the world, or even *God*, *owes* you.

Because of carelessness, or a critical spirit, or just plain old-fashioned *pride*, we may *never* be truly thankful for all that God has given us. I know *I’m* not. I pretty much gave up on the promise of on-board Wi-Fi before I got to Memphis the first night out. And I did *more* than my fair share of griping on the online survey Greyhound offered me upon completion of my trip. And I was at least a little relieved when young Leslie finally nodded off, and I no longer had to attend to talk of ghosts and zombies, or worry every time he opened his big unwieldy container of Hawaiian Punch. But as the bus pulled away from the stop behind the McDonald’s in Mt. Vernon, the last stop before Evansville, I was very, *very* thankful to be coming home.

I confess that I sometimes have a little trouble with that rejoicing always stuff. And, though I walk around wearing clothes that indicate otherwise, I sometimes fail to pray without ceasing. But until the trumpet sounds, and our Lord rolls up time and space like a scroll, or until *my* time is completed and he lets me come home, I *for one* plan to do my best to give thanks in all circumstances, and especially for *this* time, and for *this* place, and for my *real* journey, with *you*.