



Ecumenical Worship & Pie Reception

Wednesday, November 23 6:30pm



November 23, 2022 | Thanksgiving Eve Service
Charlie Berthoud | 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. -1 Thessalonians 5.16-18

After the big snowstorm in Buffalo last week, I saw a video of a woman shoveling snow, repeating to herself:

“We don’t have earthquakes, we don’t have hurricanes, we don’t have alligators. We don’t have earthquakes, we don’t have hurricanes, we don’t have alligators.”

It was amusing, but also spiritually deep, I believe.

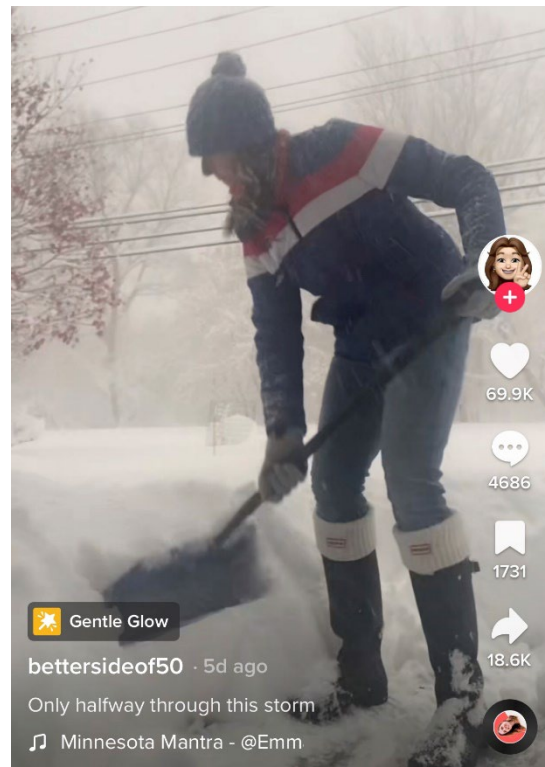
She seems to have taken Paul’s words “give thanks in all circumstances” to heart. That’s hard to do.

My wife and I tested positive for Covid 2.5 weeks ago, and we had a couple of rough days. Note: I’ve tested negative for the past ten days.

I tried to maintain gratitude during my illness:

- for vaccines which mean Covid cases are much less severe,
- for courageous and smart medical professionals,
- for caring neighbors and friends.

But if you had contacted me in the midst of those not-good days and said: Charlie,



you know the Bible says “you should be thankful in **all** circumstances” I would not have been very receptive to the message.

It’s good to be thankful, and I do think it’s possible in some way to be thankful in all circumstances.

But we shouldn’t force thankfulness on people when they are hurting. That’s rude and ineffective.

This is why the holiday season can be hard for people who are dealing with grief or illness or despair, as there is this sense that we “should” be thankful and happy all the time.

What we need to do is to cultivate a grateful heart during the good days, the average days, so that when the hard times come—and they will come—we will have a foundation of gratitude to help us get through challenging times.

This is why it’s good to have a specific day for Thanksgiving—if we’re in a place to engage with it.

Our opening hymn “Now Thank We All Our God” was written by Martin Rinkart a German Lutheran pastor in the 1600s. He wrote the hymn during the 30 Years’ War, a time of violence and plague, when he conducted hundreds of funerals per year, sometimes dozens in a day. Yet in the midst of that horror, we was able to write:

*Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in Whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mothers’ arms has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.*

That hymn inspires me to cultivate gratitude, as I’ve never experienced anything close to the horrors of the Thirty Year’s War.

It’s as if we have to make our thankfulness muscles strong for the day when life will get very hard—and that day will come, probably more than once.

As Christians we have extra reason to be thankful—for the good news of the

gospel, the steadfast love of God in Jesus Christ, which provides for us forgiveness along with abundant and eternal life.

So I'm thankful for Thanksgiving Day, and for the reminder of the importance of strengthening our thankful muscles.

I want to close with a prayer from a poem by George Herbert which actually asks God to strengthen our most important gratitude muscle.

*Thou that hast given so much to me,
Give one thing more—a grateful heart...
Not thankful when it pleaseth me,
As if thy blessings had spare days,
But such a heart whose Pulse may be
Thy Praise.
—George Herbert “Gratefulness” 1593-1633*

Happy Thanksgiving! Amen.