

Message: *Kin-dom Gratitude*

May God's Grace and peace be with you this day!

In Our series of Kin-dom Living, the scriptures have led us to explore different aspects of living into this call to follow Jesus as disciples. My hope is that as we focus on each facet of kin-dom living, each of us will identify (I will identify) areas for growth in discipleship. The focus of Kin-dom living for today is gratitude.

When you approach someone, I suspect many of us will greet the person with a 'Hi, How are you?' And you probably get a response like, 'ok I guess' or 'pretty good'. My father likes to say, 'Pretty good for a young fellow!' I am likely to say, 'so far so good, but it's still early...plenty of time for improvement.' However, it is rare that I hear someone say, 'I'm grateful.' After reading today's scriptures, perhaps we may say it a bit more frequently than before.

To hear that comment, 'I'm grateful' reminds me that even when the times of life are hard, trying, tragic, or not going according to MY plan, I can choose my response.

This is the message the prophet Jeremiah has for God's people who have been removed from their homeland and relocated, exiled to a different country. Jeremiah instructs the people to, in essence, bloom where they are planted. As the wisdom writer of Ecclesiastes says, there is a time to plant and a time to uproot (3:2). Jeremiah says... people, we've been uprooted, now is the time to plant and bloom right where we are.

And this is true in every age... we have a choice... we choose our response to the stuff of life.

As most of you know, In January I was approved for Provisional Membership as an Elder by the BoOM of the BWC of the UMC. There are historic questions to respond to; there is a bible study to be conducted; and a sermon to be given. Each is submitted and scored., and prayerfully, an invitation to be orally examined is given.

What you may not know is that in 2015 I sat for the exam and was not approved. Rather, I was recommended for further work in theological articulation. In other words... I did not pass one of the areas of scrutiny. But, I did pass most of them.

I was devastated. And I did contemplate a host of responses... giving up and leaving ministry (others had)... quitting the process and remaining as a licensed preacher (others had)... not showing up for service the next Sunday... or participating in the necessary steps to move forward.

I sought support from trusted mentors and friends... who provided a listening ear (and tissues) and prayer, wisdom, and affirmation of gifts for ministry. I reflected on the experience of the exam and what lessons I could take with me. And I chose to face each congregation with the news and a spirit of try, try, again.

This January, after the exam session, I understood the response of the person who praised God and returned to Jesus' feet. The buffeting I had endured the year before was replaced by laughter and a song in my heart.

And when my sweet Olivia Rose, the 8 yr old toy poodle who lived with a heart mummer, died in February, I was devastated again. Yet I am grateful ... not that she died, but that the timing of her death allowed her (& I) to be supported by a dear friend and caretaker who just happened to be in the area preparing her house to sell having moved to Maine in October. I am grateful each day, as I am greeted by Zachary, who came to live with us as a companion for Ivy Rose. I am grateful for the opportunity to grieve before having to transition to a new appointment.

Friends, There are many moments and situations in our lives that hurt, cause pain, grief, and angst. In God's infinite wisdom, we are created to respond. Were it not for God, and my friends and mentors, I would not be here to share this word with you. To God be the glory! God faithfulness can and will break the chains of pain and loss.

Here's the thing: gratitude, like all of our other options, becomes easier to choose as we practice it. Gratitude, like faith and hope and love and commitment, are not inborn traits that some have and others don't. Rather, gratitude is more like a muscle that can be strengthened over time. And as you practice giving thanks and more frequently share your gratitude, you not only grow in gratitude but create an example for others. Furthermore, you create a climate in which it is easier to be grateful and encourage those around you to see the blessings all around us.

May we remember the words given to Jeremiah to share... bloom where you are... where you are planted... engage in the work of living in God's kin-dom, being fruitful... for your welfare depends on it ... being grateful rubs off on others... share the good news of your faith and what God has done for you... offer prayer... and gather hope.

Amen.