

Our next reading is going to come from the letter that Paul and his companion Timothy write to the church in Colossae. We call this letter Colossians. Colossae is a town that is located in what is the modern day country of Turkey. In our reading we will see that the church in Colossae was started by a person named Epaphras. Paul and Timothy have heard that the church is being exposed to some teachings that may be harmful to them and so they write this letter to give them some guidance.

Most of Paul's letters that are recorded in the Bible begin with Paul thanking the church and community. That is what we are about to read. We will read the first part of this letter which is Paul thanking them for their faithfulness. This is an appropriate scripture to read as we prepare to celebrate the holiday of Thanksgiving. The portion of this letter which I will be reading is slightly different from what is printed in the bulletin.

Read Colossians 1:1-14

This coming week is our country's celebration of Thanksgiving. You may be looking forward to this time with family or you may be dreading it. You may be looking forward to traveling or spending time at home. Either way, whether you look forward to the Thanksgiving holiday or you are dreading it, I think that gathering in worship today is an important time to spend some authentic time in thanksgiving. You don't have to pretend here. We can take some time to turn to God and truly be thankful.

Bridgette Lacy reminds us of how important it is to be thankful especially during the most difficult of times. I invite you to listen to her words:

"The table was set with the good china. Platters of fried chicken and bowls of greens and vegetables lined the table. I was sitting at the big feast with my extended family. But I barely filled my plate on that warm Thanksgiving Day in 1999.

I couldn't smell the roasted turkey. The aroma of sweet potato casserole and the buttery perfume of homemade cakes and pies filled the room but did not register with me. It was the first Thanksgiving after I had brain surgery, and I wasn't feeling particularly thankful.

I was depressed over losing my sense of smell -- and the vision in one eye. A neurosurgeon had removed a benign tumor, and two months later, I was still broken and battered. I retreated to a corner. My mother's cheery and familiar face was the only bright spot that day.

Thanksgiving had been one of my favorite holidays. But in 1999, I was filled with anger, mourning my losses. I was struggling to understand what had happened -- I had gone to the doctor on a Wednesday because I had a floater in my eye, and the following Monday I was having a 5 ½-hour surgery.

The neurosurgeon had warned me that the procedure would likely destroy my olfactory nerve, but at first I thought it had come through the surgery intact.

Then one day I burned a pot roast to a crisp. I ran outside to my garden and snipped off pieces of rosemary and lavender and inhaled. Nothing. I realized that another part of me was gone.

Losing vision in my right eye had been a total shock. Without peripheral vision, I often stumbled and fell. I needed more light in the house to see where I was going. Initially, I had a hard time reading.

By November, I had not returned to work, and I wasn't sure I'd ever write again. I was overwhelmed with loss, and even at Thanksgiving, I couldn't regain the sense of gratitude I had had most of my life.

My minister, the late Rev. Lawrence Neale Jones, told me to ask God this: God, what do you want me to do with one eye and without a sense of smell?

I was reminded of the biblical verse from 2 Corinthians, 'We walk by faith, not by sight.' I knew I needed to keep putting one foot in front of the other, not sure where I was going but trusting God to lead me. As a Christian, I believe that faith turns adversity into advantage. Through faith, we realize we are not relegated to what we can see, feel and touch. Our faith creates a whole new point of reference.

For a long time, I prayed for God to restore my sight and my sense of smell. Eventually, I realized that even though that would not happen, I would still be healed.

Thanksgiving is about celebrating what you have, not grieving what you have lost. It's not just about the food; it's about family and gratitude and all kinds of bounty. Being thankful requires letting go of the things we can't control and accepting and embracing what we can control."

As we approach Thanksgiving it is easy to focus on what we don't have. The loved one no longer with us. The dream that has died. The path that ended at a dead end. The relationship that turned sour. The job that was terminated. The disappearance of something that is now lost.

It's easy to focus on the parts of our lives that bring us sadness. The overwhelming sense of dread when we see so much violence and hatred around us. Our own financial struggles. Family members which have made poor choices.

But the season of Thanksgiving is an invitation to be thankful for what we do have. The family member or friend that seems to show up at just the right time. The random act of kindness from a stranger. The new opportunity that presents itself. The new relationship that has been formed. The beginning of a new opportunity.

As we move toward our time of prayer later in the worship service this morning, I once again invite you to take the slip of paper that you were provided and write out at least one thing that you are thankful for.

This is a time for us to focus on something good in our life and to be thankful. AMEN.

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-Lacy, Bridgette, "Giving Thanks in a Difficult Season"

https://www.faithandleadership.com/bridgette-lacy-giving-thanks-difficult-season?utm_source=FL_newsletter&utm_medium=content&utm_campaign=FL_feature

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