



**Sermons from St. Marks  
United Church of Christ  
New Albany, Indiana**



**Danke Schoen, Gracias, Grazi, Merci, Thank You!**

**Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22**

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There are many words that say ‘Thank you.’ I chose several in my sermon title. Danke Schoen. Gracias. Grazi. Merci. Thank you! People all around the world have the ability and the desire to say thank you.

There are gestures of thank you as well. I often marvel as many of the gestures of thank you to God that people offer.

Each week when we listen to our choirs sing, guiding us in Worship, we are blessed with people who are saying thank you to God.

People who work in the Soup Kitchen, the Clothes Closet, serve on the Church Council, or on Committees, or teach Sunday School, or work with kids, or do the sound system, are people who are saying thank you to God. Our Archives room has been completely redecorated and renovated. People said thank you to God.

Thanksgiving is this coming Thursday. We gather, eat turkey, give thanks, and remember the Pilgrims. A bit. Sometimes when I hear the stories of Thanksgiving and read some of the cards and such it all sounds like it has become a bit cliché. It most certainly shouldn’t. This ability to offer thanks to others and to God is so incredibly important.

The words of St. Paul today are not all that unfamiliar. The Commission we use at the end of each Worship Service is derived from Paul’s words.

These words ring out loudly:

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

Give thanks in all circumstances. This is a challenge for us. How is it that we give thanks in all circumstances? What is the key to this sort of graciousness?

There are probably lots of keys and lots of ways of looking at this. I've boiled it down to two.

Gratitude and graciousness come in the ability to say thank you and having the ability to be generous enough to receive the gratitude of others.

Garrison Keillor tells a wonderful story about this lack of graciousness that so often afflicts people. He wrote of a young man who had become very successful and wanted to show his parents his appreciation by taking them out to a very fine restaurant and treating them both to their favorites, a prime rib dinner.

He was devastated. His parents ordered meat loaf. They thought that they were being nice, because the meat loaf was cheaper, but their actions proved to be hurtful. Their son longed to do something special for them, longed to thank them in a generous way, and they lacked the graciousness to receive the gift.

Sometimes the phrases 'thank you' and 'I'm sorry,' have a great deal in common.

When people apologize, take note of how they apologize.

If someone says, "I'm sorry," and leaves it at that, and just adds that they were wrong and won't ever do it again, or something like that, it is an apology.

However, if the word 'but' shows up, it's all changed. "I'm sorry....but," is not an apology. It's a rationalization. It's an excuse. The word 'but' nullified the words "I'm sorry."

When we say 'thank you' it is a great deal like this.

"Thank you." You can add, for whatever you are thanking the person, appreciation of generosity, or whatever.

When the word 'but' shows up after 'thank you,' it's all different. "Thank you....but," demonstrates a severe lack of graciousness and gratitude.

Gratitude and graciousness are marvelous gifts and we need to learn not only to say 'thank you,' but develop the ability to receive the gratitude of others with grace.

The second thing about gratitude is learning to be thankful for what we actually have as opposed to what we expect.

Years ago a friend of mine told me that there were two kind of people in the world.

Now a digression. I think that there are two types of people in the world. There are people who really believe that there are two types of people in the world, and there are people, like me, who gets majorly annoyed when people keep telling me that there are two types of people in the world. But I'm going to make an exception because I think that my friend had a point.

He said that there were two types of people in the world.

The first type which he called the Romantics are people who have a romanticized view of the way life ought to be. They dream of experiences and build great expectations on how life really should be.

And, they spend most of their lives disappointed because reality rarely lives up to expectations. When we expect things to go as we think they ought to go and we build our hopes and dreams on these expectations of everything working out according to our plans, we are destined to be disappointed.

People have often done this with family life.

I remember the TV shows growing up.

*Ozzie and Harriet*. Perfect family.

*Father Knows Best*. Perfect family.

*Leave it to Beaver*. Perfect family.

I use the phrase 'perfect family' in something of a facetious fashion because these were all romanticized views of the way some people believed families ought to be.

But if you watched those shows and dreamed your family would be like that, you'd be doomed to a life of crushing disappointment. Real life didn't quite match up.

Then television changed and family life changed.

Do you remember *All in the Family*? Anyone who watched that show did not believe that this comically dysfunctional group was a perfect family. But, what made the show so funny and real was that virtually every family has an Archie Bunker in it.

*Roseanne*. That show demonstrated another amusing family that was far from perfect. The parents annoyed each other. The kids annoyed the parents. The parents annoyed the kids. The kids annoyed each other. It was, at times, painfully real.

I also used to love *The Cosby Show*. This show was almost a mix of romanticism and reality. But one episode struck me as so real. It was the time the parents went to their younger child's band concert in school. Many younger child's band concerts in school have the knack of finding the lost chord; and when you hear it you are grateful that it was lost for so long. TV shows of a different era made these bands sound like the Boston Pops, but on this episode of *Cosby* the band sounded just awful. And real.

A romanticized view of life tends to lead to disappointment.

On the other hand, he said that there were those who were sentimentalists. The sentimentalists were the people who lived their lives and enjoyed those precious moments in life when they were with family and friends. They didn't come in with expectations, they just enjoyed the experiences and lived their lives creating opportunities to relive these experiences or make new ones.

I have found it so much easier to have a heart filled with gratitude when I am more sentimental in my approach to life than when I build up romanticized views on how things ought to be. It is far easier to be grateful when we enjoy what we actually have, as opposed to what we expect or even demand to have.

The words of St. Paul ring out.

Rejoice. Always.

Give thanks. In all circumstances.

Whether we realize it or not, one of the greatest gifts God gives us is the ability to be grateful and to be willing to graciously accept the gratitude of others. This week we give thanks unto God. Let us be blessed by that.