

Thanking God at Every Turn  
I Timothy 1:12-17

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God is good.....All the time....All the time, God is good.

Week after week I spend 14-20 hours preparing a sermon. Today is different. I have spent 40 years preparing this one. Let me explain. Forty years ago this past June, at the tender age of 18, I took my first church. The congregation would have easily fit inside this pulpit. Nevertheless, I was their pastor and I began to learn the discipline of delivering a sermon every week.

Forty years ago today Sandy and I were married in the little church of our childhood. Our kids had a party for us Friday night, and one of our dearest friends gave us a card that said this: "You two are still married? You are stubborn little devils aren't you? Congratulations!" God is good.

Today I join the Apostle Paul in this refreshing word of thanksgiving that he writes to Timothy. *"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service."* Today I just want to praise the Lord. Will you join me?

**God's Glory is Unimaginable**

Verse 17: *"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."*

Behold the glory of God, the Kabod, the Shekinah, the doxa, the honor, the dignity, and the luminous, warm, bright, blessedness of the One who was, who is, and who is to come. Have you pondered the glory of God lately?

The glory of God was revealed to Moses on the mountain. As Moses stood in the cleft of the rock, the glory of the Lord passed by and Moses glimpsed the backside of God.

The glory of God was revealed to Isaiah in the temple. *"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple."*

The glory of God was revealed to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified.

The glory of God was revealed to Paul on the road to Damascus. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. Paul fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" "*The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands,*" says the Psalmist.

The older I have gotten, the bigger God has become. The longer I serve God, the less I understand God. When I was 18 and starting out I thought I understood all of it, but now at 59 I am not sure I understand any of it. The majesty, the glory, the wonder of God is far beyond my comprehension and once in awhile I get overwhelmed with that fact.

Lewis Smedes says, "My father-in-law is batting 1000% when it comes to buying the right Christmas present for his wife. He manages to give her exactly what she wants every year. The secret to his success is simple. She goes downtown to the department store and picks out whatever she wants for Christmas that year. Then she comes home and tells her husband what it is all the way down to the model number and the sales person from whom to get it. Then my father-in-law goes down to the store, does his shopping, has it wrapped in bright holiday paper and the job is done. No risk, no surprise, no disappointment.

Once upon a time it was the job of theologians to protect the mystery of Christ from the heretics who wanted to explain it all away. Theology said, "Don't try to explain it; believe it and wonder at it." The theology turned against the wonder it was hired to protect. Theologians did not like strings left untied, knots left unstuck, and questions left dangling. So we eliminated surprise from the scripture and explained the ways of God according to our understanding. God became reasonable, predictable, controllable, domesticated, boring.

Abraham Heschel, a Jewish theologian, on his deathbed said: "Never once in my life did I ask God for success, or wisdom, or power or fame. I asked for wonder and He gave it to me."

Twinkle, twinkle, little star, I am still wondering what you are. The majesty of God is more that I can comprehend. So I fall on my knees and cry glory, glory to my God. God is good.

### **The Patience of God is Unlimited**

Verse 16: "*In me Christ displayed his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.*"

When our boys were little, they brought home from Sunday school a plastic coffee can lid with their picture pasted on it and these words printed below, "Be patient, God isn't finished with me yet." I keep saying that to every congregation I try to serve. God has unlimited patience.

As recent hurricanes play havoc with our ordered lives, I thought about the days I used to work floods and tornadoes for United Methodist Committee on Relief. I

remember standing in the center of a small town that had been completely destroyed the night before by a tornado. As I passed out bologna sandwiches to dazed people, a leader of that community came up to me and said, "What do you think the Lord is trying to tell us by sending this storm?" How quickly we assume the judgment of God. How quickly we want to jump on an act of nature and assume that it is God's judgment on us.

On 9/11 when terrorists attacked our homeland, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson announced that the judgment of God was finally coming home to condemn us for our wicked ways. Since when is God and terrorist on the same team? Martin Luther once said, "If I were God, I would kick the world to pieces." The Bible says, "*God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love*" (Ps. 103:8).

We grow impatient with the situations of the world. We grow weary with the circumstances of life. We get tired of the situations that we face day after day. Seeing the evil of the world we ask God, "Why don't you do something about it?" Why don't you act? Why don't you move? But we are not God.

God has a long fuse. Compassion moves God to put up with things a while longer for the sake of people. Compassion does not rush to judgment. It waits patiently for a new day, a tomorrow when things may change. Compassion is the power not to foreclose on the future. The patience of God is unlimited.

Consider the ways of God with the city of Nineveh. It is a fascinating story in the Old Testament. The violence of these 120,000 people makes God sick to his stomach. So He sent Jonah to declare that the grace period has ended, the Day of Judgment has come, and God has had enough. Jonah proclaims his message with dry eyes and a weird smile. He hated godless, atheistic, violent Nineveh more than the Lord did. So he announced their destruction with a sense of joy.

The awful day came and nothing happened. The sun rose, kids played, men worked and women did whatever women did in that ancient city. The dance went on. The holocaust was postponed. Jonah was furious. He was hopping mad at God. "That is why I ran in the first place," snaps Jonah. "I knew you were this kind of God, having mercy on people who do not deserve mercy, sparing those who deserve to be destroyed."

Do you ever feel like Jonah? Are you angry at the kind of world we have to live in and the sort of God we have to live with? Why does God let human history go on when everything seems so wrong? God, don't just sit there on your throne. Do something about the starving places of the world. Have not we raised the same question that Jonah asked? Maybe God is saying to us, don't give up too quickly when everything seems to be going wrong. We should not give up too quickly on our troubled marriages. We should not give up too quickly on our wayward children. Don't demand that everything be all right today. God moves on a different timetable. God is good.

## **God's Mercy is Unending**

Verse 13: *Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy.*

Mercy there was great and grace was free  
Pardon there was multiplied to me  
There my burdened soul found liberty  
At Calvary!

In the late 1700's, John Newton was born the only child of a respectable sea captain. His mother dedicated him to the Christian ministry as a baby. At the age of four he could recite the Westminster Catechism. As a child he could sing the hymns from memory. At age 11 he started sailing the seas with his father. By 17 he had laid aside every Christian principle he knew and sold his soul as a slave trader on the Island of Sierra Leone. Newton forgot God to rationalize his guilt. But God had not forgotten him. One day aboard a slave ship where human life was cheap and the stench of death was rampant, Newton writes, "I remembered Jesus whom I had so often derided." Toward the end of his life the old converted sea captain said, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things. That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior."

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me,  
I once was lost, but now I'm found,  
T'was blind but now I see.

Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.

He's been my rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time  
of storm. His grace has been greater than all my sin. His  
strength has helped me keep on keeping on. Yea, though I  
have walked through the valleys of illness, I have feared no  
evil for God has been with me. When I have been way over  
my head in some challenge of ministry, his hand has steadied  
me. Most of all, when I have touched the bottom, I have found  
it sound. So how can I say thanks for the things he has done  
for me?

If I were an artist, I would render him a painting.  
If I were an architect, I would design him a building.  
If I were a musician, I would sing him a song.  
If I were a philanthropist, I would give him my all.

Since I am what I am, a sinner saved by grace, I'll just tell of His mercy all the way home. God is good.....All the time....All the time, God is good.

