

## Gratitude in Particular

I Corinthians 1: 3-9

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, (Nov. 20) 2011

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This Sunday morning has a lot going on it – baby dedication, Holy Communion; it’s the Sunday preceding Thanksgiving, where we give thanks for what has been, and next Sunday is the First Sunday of Advent, where we look forward to what will be. Besides that, if it hasn’t started already, Friday begins the most frenzied time of consumerism of the year. There’s a lot going on.

Rather than being splintered and confused by it all, here in his first letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul says there’s a connection between giving thanks and waiting hopefully for what is coming in Christ. For Paul, the key understanding for the hope we have in front of us is glimpsed in what God has done in our past for which we can give thanks. Gratitude and hope go hand-in-hand.

But the gratitude is not some generalized, “Let’s all be thankful this week.” For Paul, gratitude has a face; it has a particular shape and is specific. Paul gives thanks for the particular people there in the church in Corinth he knows by name. He remembers their look, their personalities, who they are and what they do. It is in remembering how God is working in and through these particular people that gives rise to his gratitude and at the same time, feeds his hope in what Christ will do someday.

To help us get at this, I want you to do something for me this morning. I’d like for you to hold both of your hands in front of you, palms upward, with the

little finger of each hand just touching. As you look at your hands, begin to think about the hands of God the Father who made all things including the complexity and care of making your hands. At the same time, it was the hands of Christ the Son who was crucified as he showed us how much God loved us. And look at your two hands and think about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's hands are the ones you are looking at right now. That's what it means to be Christian (from Sam Wells, *Be Not Afraid*, p. 200). You can put your hands down now.

I wonder how often we use both hands. I remember as a kid being taught in both baseball and football to use both hands. We thought it was cool to try to one-hand it; to casually catch a deep fly ball one-handed was a way to look good, except that we usually dropped the ball. The coaches would yell, "Both hands!" Same in football – over and over again, we were drilled in catching the football with both hands. Look at the ball – focus – and look the ball into both hands.

Doing things one-handed seems natural in our multi-tasking world. We catch the ball one-handed because we know we need to throw the ball with the other or we already thinking about how we're going to run with the ball. Automatic transmissions in our cars allow us to drive one-handed so we can multitask at the same time: we have one hand free to talk on the phone, program the GPS, or eat fast-food (which is a one-handed food). We text and talk and watch TV and look at a computer all at the same, one hand flying from one thing to another while the other hand does something else.

It makes me wonder what things make us interrupt our one-handed culture. What things does it take two hands? We use both hands with Hudson Hardy. Holding him and blessing him is not a one-handed job. When the doctor handed him newly-born to Sarah, I'm sure the doctor or nurse used two hands. And when

Sarah held him for the first time, I bet she used two hands. When they handed him to me this morning, I carefully had both hands under him.

The greatest gifts of God take two hands. And we get into trouble when we try to one-hand them. Living the life God gives us takes two hands. It takes time. It takes joy and real joy takes time. Raising a child takes time. Knowing God takes time – because it takes longer to assimilate, know, and enjoy than when we grab with one hand. This morning when we receive the Lord's Supper, it takes two hands. When we pray we put two hands together. When we receive the benediction before going out into the world, we hold on with both hands.

This week think about the gifts from God in your particular life that take two hands and give thanks to God for them.

The day Jane and I got married took all day. The rehearsal the evening before, then the dinner, followed by a party and then up for an early morning breakfast with all her extended family followed by getting ready, then up to the church for pictures. The ceremony marriage service itself took a good hour and included three congregations and two preachers. Then the reception there at the church followed by dinner at a very nice restaurant for the immediate family, and then another party, mainly for younger people, in a Catholic church fellowship hall where we could dance. It was an all day event and half of the night. And at the end of the worship service when Jane and I embraced, it took two hands. Indeed, it took more – it took everything in me. It still does. And I give thanks.

Amen.