

“Happy Hand-me-Downs”

When I was growing up, there were two things that my younger brother Michael had that I never did. And, well, I guess I will just have to admit that I coveted these things. When you hear what they are, you will be surprised because they are two things that MOST people do not want. I guess this goes a long way towards the theory of “the grass is always greener on the other side of the hill.”

Any way, the first thing was FRECKLES! Michael had a small spattering of freckles right across the bridge of his nose and I thought they were SOOO cute. Of course, he hated them, especially if someone mentioned how cute they were, which was often. As a little girl, I would go to bed at night and just pray and pray that I would wake up with freckles. God just waited a few decades and gave me wrinkles instead! My daughter DID get the freckles which she hates as well. Whenever I see her powdering her nose to cover them up and say how I always wanted freckles, I discover that 32 year olds can STILL do the teenage eye roll. And she just keeps on powdering.

The other thing was HAND-ME-DOWNS. I grew up in a family of seven boy cousins and me. Michael was the fourth out of seven. We also lived in a neighborhood full of boys and only two girls who were sisters. So Michael had a closet full of clothes that had belonged to someone else first and all I had was NEW ones! Now, I realize how ridiculous this sounds today but, as a little girl, there seemed something almost romantic about wearing something that had been so important to someone else like a well worn sweatshirt or favorite Sunday dress.

I thought about these yearnings as I began to consider all that I have to be thankful for this Thanksgiving season. And the more I thought about it, the more I realized that your lives and mine are really just FULL of hand-me-downs. Take education, for example. As school children we spend much time learning things that we think must surely be useless. It takes age and maturity to realize that we have been given a wonderful world of hand-me-downs. The classic lines of Paschal in mathematics and Aristotle in philosophy and Shakespeare in literature. Things that other men and women worked hard to achieve that are quite simply handed to us with no effort on our part.

Many of our buildings are hand-me-downs. Our campus is a perfect example. This beautiful sanctuary that has seen so much history and so many changes in our nation, our town and our congregation is truly a legacy that we can consider a gift from our ancestors in the faith. The same its true the cemetery. And moving out of our personal sphere, many useful buildings like public libraries and theaters are also ours to enjoy because they have been handed down.

We reap the benefits of many buildings that we did not ask for or even work to establish. Perhaps a small amount of our taxes or pledges might go for upkeep or a fee taken at the beginning of our visit might be required, but we have actually done very little to provide for their existence.

Even the medical field is full of hand-me-downs. Now, I know that most of us pay and pay substantially for our medical care but what have we done to deserve the knowledge that had been handed down since the time of Hippocrates. Even today, our constant changes and advancements in medicine are built upon discoveries of science and the law of nature that have been studied and perfected for centuries.

I hope you are getting my point. The truth is that the world is full of things that we never had to ask for, provide for, or even pay for that make OUR lives fuller and more meaningful today. It seems that we live in a hand-me-down world! And as we examine our hand-me-downs, it also seems to me that we have added reasons to celebrate Thanksgiving. Ellsworth Kalas writes, “It’s time to look at our intellectual, social, political, economic and spiritual wardrobes and give thanks for all those cousins who have blessed us with hand-me-downs.”

Well, the same can be said for our ancestry – the heritage that has been passed on from generation to generation. I am talking of course about the family we call the human race. Now I will be the first to admit that every family has folks that we would not want to be spotlighted in the news! We *all* have a weird Uncle Joe or eccentric Aunt Sally. I once bought a birthday card for my sister-in-law. On the front there were these cartoonish figures meandering around and one asks the question – “Have you ever noticed how every family has one person in it that is just shockingly normal?” When you opened the card it said, “We should get ourselves one of those!”

But the writer of our Psalm this morning is reminding us of a heritage that we can be proud of. He recalls that we are members of the household of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This gives us a whole new reason to give thanks as we remember that we can be identified with those who founded our faith because we are members of the household of God. When we say that we are Christians, we remind ourselves and others not only WHO we are but TO WHOM we belong.

So we can claim that our blood pumps through our veins with the courage of Abraham that would enable him to leave his homeland and answer the call of God. We

carry the faith of Moses who led God's children out of Egypt and the political savvy of Deborah that could lead men in ancient times in a successful battle with the enemies of the day. Our minds have inherited the curiosity of Peter that would question the Lord and our hearts hold the stamina of Paul that would enable him to write with joy while in prison and awaiting his own execution.

What I am trying to say is that all of life is a hand-me-down from God – the very Lord of the universe. Perhaps that is what Jesus is saying so eloquently in his familiar words from the Sermon on the Mount. Now, I will be honest and say that this passage has never been one of my favorites. First of all, it stresses that we should not worry and well, worrying is one of my best gifts! Also, I am a practical person and I know that there are plenty of birds that go hungry and flowers that die – especially if they have the misfortune to be planted in MY yard. But perhaps I am taking the passage too literally.

When I decided to look at these words with the spirit of Thanksgiving in mind, I realized that having the attitude of Christ enables me to consider how the lilies of the field reflect the glory of the Creator. During the vibrant fall season, these words call us to remember that the wonders of nature are, in and of themselves, a cause for celebration. Jesus' words help me draw my attention away from the frantic pursuit of things that I don't really need and concentrate on a calmer vision of God's bountiful care in the natural world. And truly God's beauty is given to us in abundance without our asking.

Much of nature is carefully planted and cared for like the beautiful flowers that I have seen from around Debbie Balltrip's fish pond or arranged with great care by Stephanie Heath. But have you ever seen a flower grow through a crack in the asphalt? Truly it is just as beautiful. One of the most glorious sights I have ever seen was

daffodils growing through the snow when a May snowstorm hit Denver right before I traveled there. These are abundant sights that no human had a hand in.

One of the things that my older grandson loves to do with me is fill the birdfeeders. Then we wait with anticipation to watch the cardinals taking turns on the branches of a tree to eat their fill. Humans may help care for them, but we can claim nothing in their beauty and creation.

This handiwork of God as well as mountains and oceans and waterfalls and sunsets are handed down to us every day by the generous God of beauty and abundance without our asking and certainly without our deserving. In fact, have you ever thought that God could have chosen to make the whole world in black and white? But God did not. He blessed us with glorious colors to stimulate our imaginations and blaze their ways into our hearts and minds.

In another line of thinking, some of the greatest gifts that have been handed down to us are the promises of God, which we can be reminded of every time we pick up the word. By this gift we know that God has kept us in His care since before our birth. And that it is God's plan to always keep us in His care. I copied these words in my "quote book" from a devotion once without giving credit to the author but I simply love what it says.

“If you believe that God’s grace has saved you, then you *must* believe that He is meaning to save you yet more and to keep you in the way that you should go. Even human rescuers would not save you from drowning only to place you in other deep and dangerous waters. Rather, they would place you on dry land, there to restore you. God,

who *is your rescuer*, would certainly do this and even more. God will complete the task He sets out to do. He will not throw you overboard if you are depending on Him."

Which in the list of the gifts that God has handed down that we must be thankful for leads to the greatest gift of all - the gift of the grace of salvation. The promise that God is always with us, walking with us, even carrying us when we need it. The truth that the God of grace lived among us in the flesh and died for our sins on the cross and rose again to show victory over our sins. Though everyone here is undeserving of such abundance and can never buy or earn the gifts that God offers, God gives them to us freely out of His great love for us.

Our daughter graduated from a private, Christian high school. When they were seniors, they were asked to turn in their favorite Bible verse to be printed in the yearbook with their senior picture. Katie chose the last verse of our Scripture for this morning. "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." When I read that this was her choice, I was shocked. How could my own daughter not have inherited my worrying gene?

Will say that, since she has become a mother, it is not as easy for her to rely on these verses. So one day when I was in a gift shop, I saw this verse painted on a beautiful ceramic tile and bought it for her. She hung it in her kitchen where she can be reminded every day of the trust that she can place in God. And I pray that it reminds her to drink in the beauty of the world around her, and to see in her children the promises of our future in God's care.

So as we gather around our tables this week and give thanks to God, I know that everyone here will remember to be thankful for family, for friends, for this church

community, for our health and other blessings. But those are the gifts that we remember every day because they are so IMPORTANT to us and cherished by us. I would like to challenge each of us here, myself included, to let our thanks extend beyond the “normal” list.

And while I guess I given up wishing for freckles, THIS YEAR, I hope I can wear with joy, love and humility the many hand-me-downs that God has blessed me with. May we be thankful that these gifts, like all gifts from God, are not shared with us just for the moment. Because God calls us to hand down all the gifts that we enjoy and to be thankful that we know that we will carry them with us into eternity. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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November 19, 2107, Nazareth Presbyterian Church

O Lord, our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth. We give You thanks for family, friends, life, love— for all the blessings you have bestowed upon us. Thank you for the brave men and women who have come before us in faith as the founders of this nation and of this church home. Bless us as we seek to continue the legacy of freedom and righteousness that you have taught us.

God of our Mothers and Fathers, your desire for us leads the way. May we have the ears to hear the cries of this world, responding with hope and faith. Fill us with Your love that we may see deeply all the needs around us. Help us to care for others with the same compassion that you bestow on us every day. Be with all those that are struggling as they face the first holiday season without a special loved one. Be with those who are lonely and teach us to open our hearts and our homes to those who need to feel your presence.

Cover the sick, the grieving, the addicted, the oppressed, the confused with the steady hand of your encouraging Spirit. May Your love, Your grace, Your compassion, Your mercy, carry them in every way,

And as we leave this place, lead us with love to be Your hands and heart in the world and to follow the example of inclusiveness and compassion that our risen Lord Jesus Christ taught us. We pray in his name.
Amen.