

# ANOTHER NOVEMBER CALL FOR A RECOUNT

Sermon, November 18, 2018

Text: Hebrews 10:11-25

It won't be long before we'll be singing "*The Twelve Days of Christmas*." Well, I heard one news commentator report they were singing "*The Twelve Days of Election Day*" in the state of Florida this week! Last Monday's **Orlando Sentinel** reported that Florida Secretary of State Ken Detzner ordered recounts for three statewide elections last Saturday, placing Florida in the national spotlight once again and calling to mind the drama of previous controversial election tallies in the state, especially following the elections of 2000 and (to a lesser extent) 2012.<sup>1</sup> I believe today at noon is the FINAL final deadline mandated by the courts (actually, yesterday would have been the twelfth day of Election 2018, not today). Some of you may remember the brouhaha following the 2012 election in Florida's St. Lucie County which turned out an amazing 141.1% of the vote ... out of 175,554 registered voters, 247,713 votes were cast!<sup>2</sup> I'm hoping for a similar return on our pledge cards! The *Orlando Sentinel* then reported a county canvassing board requested the county wide recount of early-voting ballots in that race between incumbent U.S. Representative Allen West and Democrat challenger Patrick Murphy (the latter was deemed the winner).

Well, I said it then and I'll say it now ... I would like to point out the month of November DOES have an annual holiday which calls for a recount, but it's not Election Day! THANKSGIVING is the holiday we are called to count and recount our **blessings!**

As we are about to sing in our closing hymn, "*Count your blessings, name them one by one, Count your blessings, see what God has done! Count your blessings, name them one by one, Count your many blessings, see what God has done.*" As mentioned in my November **Fishermen's News** article,<sup>3</sup> I've heard lots of sermons and seminars and seen countless books and articles over the course of my (almost) six and a half decades all preoccupied with this one question: "*WHAT IS GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE?*" Well, Paul answers that in one simple sentence: "*Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). This is not rocket science. According to Paul, the will of God for our lives is for us to be joyful, prayerful and most of all *thankful* ... we are to nurture an attitude of gratitude *in* all things. This doesn't require hours of Bible study or theological degrees to figure out and put into practice. It just requires quiet, disciplined, consistent obedience to this gentle, beneficial, divine imperative, which can have a life transforming effect on us. God's will for us to give thanks in all things is predicated in part on this undeniable fact of human psychology: Bitterness and anger ... the all-too-common responses to difficulties ... are destructive to the human soul. In that article I cited my favorite quote from that great theologian ... Ann Landers ... "*Bitterness and anger are acids which destroy their containers from within.*" Bitterness and anger will corrode, consume and eventually destroy us from within.

Years ago I came across a version of the chorus of our final hymn that had six additional stanzas. Here's number two: "*Count your blessings, name them two by two, Count your blessings, see what God can do! Count your blessings, name them two by two, Count your many blessings, see what God can do!*" Counting our blessings inspires hope. When we reflect upon and really try to focus on what God has done and is doing in our individual and corporate lives, when we count the many ways we really are richly blessed, we then tend to have more faith in what God *can* do. What we have known and experienced about God and His goodness in the past usually goes on to fill us with hope and trust for what He can do in the future!

"*Count your blessings, name them three by three, Count your blessings, see what God has done for me!*" What has God done for you? Tell people about it! "*See what God has done for me!*" Talk about your blessings! When we do so, when we are sincerely vocal about how God has blessed us in ways small and large, others are encouraged and inspired to see and count their blessings as well! I'm fortunate to have a forum where I can do that every week (and get PAID for it!); in the course of my nearly twenty-two years in this pulpit, you've heard approximately eleven hundred sermons from me. (Those of you who have been here all along will get a special reward in heaven!) I love talking about what God has done for me, I really am grateful for the many blessings He has given; if it were not so, I could not stand here week after week after week and talk about God and His goodness and grace. Not all of us have pulpits, but we all have places in our lives where we can speak and testify to God's goodness and grace in our lives. We can all tell people "*what God has done for me*" ... and when we tell others, "*See what God has done for me!*" it encourages and inspires others to see and count their blessings. Gratitude is so very contagious ... and, for that matter, so is ingratitude, which fosters cynicism and negativity.

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/politics/political-pulse/os-florida-recount-vote-tally-deadline-20181110-story.html>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://townhall.com/tipsheet/heatherginsberg/2012/11/10/breaking-massive-voter-fraud-in-st-lucie-county-florida-n717245>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://greenwoodchurch.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/november-2018.pdf>

*"Count your blessings name them four by four, Count your blessings, count them more and more!"* How many routine, ordinary blessings do we take for granted? Let me name just a few. Most of us don't start out the morning hoping, say, the valves of our heart will keep working. We take it for granted. We assume that the heart will run itself while we concern ourselves with other things. But the routines of the heart are a great blessing! Just ask anyone here who has had a heart attack or suffers from an adverse cardiac condition. They would tell you to include in your "blessing count" the everyday, routine, ordinary beating of your heart! Some of us take our families for granted. *"It's just another routine day with dirty laundry and sibling arguments and messy houses and power struggles with the kids."* But family is a blessing! Ask the people here who don't have a family, or ask those here whose normal family routines have been disrupted by illness, or divorce, or addiction, or death. Some of us take our jobs for granted. *"It's just another day in the office filled with reports, deadlines, and difficult people."* But what a blessing it is to be able to work! Just ask those here who are unemployed, or who are unable to work due to disability. Some of us take our overall health for granted. But health is a huge blessing. There are a number of people *not* here this morning who would love to be able to be here, but can't due to poor health; I'm sure they would admonish all of us, *"Thank God for your health!"* You see, God is a Father, and He delights in allowing His children to enjoy *and appreciate* the ordinary, to the fullest. And like any good Father, He knows how very fragile that ordinary is! So He gives us His good law to help guide and protect us from the disruption of the normal; we break that law, and we break ourselves. And He sent his only Son into this world that we might have life; He came to show us the ordinary Way, the simple Truth, the routine Life in all its extra-ordinary glory. So, count your blessings, count them more and more, and you may just discover and appreciate just how very extraordinary the ordinary really is.

*"Count your blessings, count them five by five. Count your blessings see that God is alive!"* The words of Hebrews 10, our Scripture reading this morning: *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another. Two things: (1) "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds..." -- That phrase "spur one another on" can be translated as "provoke each other. We are actually encouraged by the Bible to **provoke** each other when we come together! (Some of us may be thinking, "That's easy, I can do that!:) To be clear, we are called to provoke each other in a **good** way. Let's provoke, prod, encourage, and even incite each other to do and say and think **good** things, and to genuinely appreciate and focus upon and magnify the good all around us that comes from the hand of a good and gracious God. (2) "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing ...." -- What happens in this sanctuary is not just coming together to greet friends, to listen to a sermon or inspiring music, or even lovingly "provoking" each other to holier living. It is all that, but there is something more that happens here; something we miss when we are not here on the Lord's day! We miss the presence of Jesus Christ, Who is always present when two or three are gathered in His name. He is uniquely present when His Body, the church, is gathered together ... and in a way that He is not when we are away from the Body and alone. His living Presence in our midst helps us better discern, appreciate and *"count our blessings and see that God is alive!"* It really is the living Christ who is among His gathered people and Who helps us provoke each other on to love and good deeds and gratitude and a better way of living. To miss that on the Lord's day is not good! This is one reason why we are to encourage each other, even provoke each other, into being here, coming here, counting our blessings together here, and *"seeing that God is alive."* If you notice someone is not here, get on the phone and call them. Or send them a card or brief note or a text or a tweet or an email or instant message saying, *"I've missed seeing you in church. I hope you are well."* Tell them they are missed. This is not an act of judgment; it is an act of care. It is never too late or too early to do that, to gently and lovingly "provoke" others to come join with us as we *"count our blessings, count them five by five, count our blessings and see that God is alive!"**

*"Count your blessings, count them six by six. Count your many blessings see what God can fix!"* There's much that could be said here, but as time is short I'll just point out that when we get in the habit of being grateful, when we make it a practice of counting our blessings and focusing on and magnifying what is right and good, things quite often just seem to "come together" in a way they don't when we aren't grateful. Things just seem to somehow get "fixed," healed, mended, made better rather than worse. The balm of appreciation heals, whereas the vinegar of ingratitude or cynicism embitters. *"All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28)."* Giving thanks is probably the most effective, yet underrated, spiritual discipline there is. Too many people, even too many Christians, follow the usual lazy downward spiral of negativity, which is a sucking and destructive vortex. It's easy to complain, to harp on what's wrong, but constantly doing so is really un-wholesome and it tends to disruption and brokenness ... broken relationships, broken spirits, broken hopes. However, truly grateful people are a delight to God and a delight to others (*not to mention a delight to themselves!*), and their habitual attitude of gratitude can also have a "fixing" effect, a healing influence, on all around. So, *"Count your many blessings, see what God can fix!"*

I close with the final stanza, which really needs no further commentary: *"Count your blessings, name them seven by seven. Count your blessings, count them all the way to heaven!"* This Thanksgiving, in response to this annual divine call for a recount, let's determine anew to count our blessings, name them seven by seven, each and every day all the way to that glorious day when we enter the heavenly realms!

Let's stand and join together in a Litany of Thanksgiving found on the back of the worship bulletin:



## A THANKSGIVING LITANY

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

FROM THE RISING OF THE SUN TO ITS SETTING, MY NAME IS GREAT  
AMONG THE NATIONS, SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS.

Praise the Lord.

THE NAME OF THE LORD BE PRAISED.

Let us pray: With hearts full of appreciation because of Your  
goodness, O God, and with thanksgiving in our souls for Your  
boundless grace and mercies,

WE PREPARE TO CELEBRATE THIS SEASON OF THANKSGIVING, JOINING  
ALL THE FAITHFUL OF OUR NATION IN GRATITUDE AND PRAISE.

Throughout the year You have opened Your hands and poured out  
upon us blessing after blessing.

YOU HAVE PROVIDED US WITH ALL WE NEED TO SUSTAIN BODY AND  
SOUL. YOU HAVE BLOTTED OUT ALL OUR SIN, CLEANSED OUR  
CONSCIENCES FROM GUILT, AND SPOKEN PEACE TO OUR HEARTS.

Richly and abundantly You have offered to us Word and Sacrament,  
that our souls may be healed, our faith strengthened, our lives  
directed.

ACCEPT THE THANKS AND PRAISE OF OUR GRATEFUL HEARTS. WE  
SING OF YOUR GOODNESS, WE PROCLAIM YOUR GLORY, AND WE CRY  
OUT WITH JOY BECAUSE OF YOUR MERCIES.

Let our thanksgiving, O Lord, move us beyond words into action. May  
we be instruments of Your grace and vehicles of Your blessing to the  
needy, the lost, the lonely, and the oppressed.

GIVE US THE GRACE AND STRENGTH TO LIVE FRUITFUL LIVES OF  
FAITHFUL DEVOTION IN GRATEFUL RESPONSE TO YOUR BOUNTY TO US  
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, WHO TAUGHT US TO PRAY ...

*The Lord's Prayer*