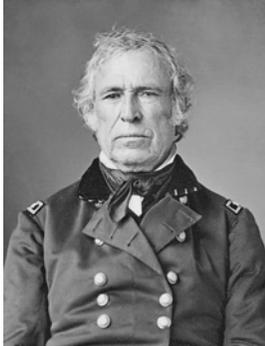


ROUGH AND READY
Sermon, November 24, 2019
Christ the King Sunday
Thanksgiving

Texts: I Thessalonians 5:16-18; Luke 21:5-19

... "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
I Thessalonians 5:16-18



As mentioned in the Time with the Children, today is the 235th birthday of Zachary Taylor, the twelfth President of the United States of America, also known as "Old Rough and Ready." (Not to be confused with Ruff and Reddy, Hanna-Barbara's first televised animation cartoon which appeared in the late fifties/early sixties featuring Reddy, the big dumb dog, and Ruff, the smart little cat ... Reddy's voice was by Daws Butler, who also was the voice behind Huckleberry Hound). Before becoming President, Taylor had a forty-plus year military career; he gained national recognition during the War of 1812 as a captain of a garrison at Fort Harrison, Indiana. Captain Taylor had fifty soldiers under his command, thirty-five of whom were gravely sick (from dysentery), leaving only fifteen soldiers able to fight when over six hundred rifle-toting, British-led American Indians launched a raid. Taylor and his fifteen men prevailed after an eleven day siege ... marking the first American military victory of the War of 1812. Later, as General Taylor, he achieved fame leading vastly outnumbered American troops to key

victories during the Mexican-American War. When the dust settled after that conflict, it was 1848, a Presidential election year, and popular incumbent President (and staunch Presbyterian!) James Knox Polk was stepping down after one term. Polk's popularity was largely due to his having achieved every campaign promise or goal he had made in 1844 ... but one of those promises was that he would only serve one term. The subsequent Democrat nominee was Michigan senator Lewis Cass, and the likely nominee for the opposition Whig party was commanding general of the U.S. Army, Winfield Scott. Scott was nicknamed "Old Fuss & Feathers" because of his always-fastidious dress uniform and his rather infamous vanity. Like Zachary Taylor, Winfield Scott was well-known to most Americans, also had a forty-plus year career in the army, but that's where the similarities ended. *Old Rough and Ready* stood 5'8", *Old Fuss and Feathers* stood 6'5" and carried the weight to match his height. General Taylor almost never wore his dress uniform; General Scott was never seen NOT wearing his dress uniform. The common soldiers thought General Scott to be a bit of a prima donna, but they loved General Taylor; he was immensely popular and was perceived as a soldier's soldier. No one really knew his political beliefs, other than he loved his country and was always ready to do what had to be done for the nation's benefit, come what may. To make a long story short, *Old Rough and Ready* was eventually drafted as the Whig nominee over *Old Fuss and Feathers*, and won the election (he died just eighteen months into his first term, July 9, 1850; and succeeded by vice president Millard Fillmore.). Today is the 235th birthday of this rough and ready man who won the hearts of the nation.

A story I've told before, but it's a wonderful Thanksgiving story that bears repeating, is about another rough and ready man; I'll give a shortened version. Pastor Martin Rinkart faithfully served the entire three decades of the Thirty Years War in the walled city of Eilenburg, Germany, a city that became the refuge of thousands. Over the course of the Thirty Years War, the population of the country would dwindle from sixteen million to six million. Overcrowded and undersupplied with food, sanitary facilities, and medical care, the walled city of Eilenburg eventually became a city of death, instead of a city of refuge. Pestilence raged throughout the crowded streets and homes, eventually claiming thousands of victims. These people knew every day pain and suffering in ways most of us can only begin to imagine. In the year 1636 (nineteen years into the Thirty Years War), a terrible plague hit Eilenburg; during this year all other ministers in that walled town either died or fled. However, Martin Rinkart stayed put ... this was his community; this is where he believed God had called him to serve. He conducted up to forty-five funerals a day, burying nearly four thousand five hundred men, women and children, during this plague in 1636. He even buried his beloved and devoted wife. Well, if you look at the lower left hand corner on page 98, our closing hymn, you will see it was in the year 1636 that Martin Rinkart penned these words: "Now thank we all our God with heart and hand and voices, Who wondrous things have done, in Whom His world rejoices; Who, from our mother's arms, hath blest us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today. O, may this bounteous God through all our life be near us, with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us; and keep us in His grace and guide us when perplexed, and free us from all ills in this world and the next. All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given, the Son and him who reigns with them in highest heaven, the one eternal God,

whom earth and heaven adore, for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore!" Something lost in the translation is that the original German is a **command**: "NUN DANKET ALLE GOTT!" This might be better paraphrased, "Now ... in the midst of the tragedy and suffering and pain all of us are experiencing to some degree or another ... nun danket alle Gott! We **will** thank our God."

"Give thanks in all circumstances!" Paul writes. By the way, in the original Greek that's a command, too. This command is from another rough and ready man who was, by his own account, frequently imprisoned, severely flogged, exposed to death again and again, five times receiving the "forty lashes minus one;" three times beaten with rods, once he was stoned, three times shipwrecked, and on and on! God's will for us to give thanks *in* all things is predicated on this undeniable fact of human psychology: Bitterness and anger ... the all-too-common responses to suffering, loss and trouble ... are *destructive* to the human soul. I have heard lots of sermons and seminars and have seen lots of books over the course of my six and a half decades all centered around this question: "What is God's will for your life?" Well, Paul answers that in one sentence: "Be joyful always, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." This is not rocket science. The will of God for your life and my life is for us to be joyful, prayerful and most of all *thankful*, to nurture an attitude of gratitude and acceptance *in* all things. This doesn't require long hours of Bible study or theological degrees to figure out and put into practice. It just requires quiet, disciplined, rough and ready obedience to this gentle, beneficial, divine imperative. Developing the discipline of constantly "counting our blessings one by one" and thanking God for them, no matter the situation, can have a life transforming effect on us ... and it can also make us a lot more pleasant to be around.

(The following paragraph was omitted at 9:00; the Zachary Taylor story was omitted at 10:30 as it was part of the Time With The Children.)

Speaking of obscure November anniversaries, another one was last Sunday. Fifty-one years ago, November 17, 1968 was also a Sunday. On the West Coast, the New York Jets (led by quarterback Joe Namath) were playing the Oakland Raiders (led by Daryl Lamonica) in what became known as the Heidi Bowl. This was in the days before VCRs and DVRs and cable TV ... there were only three channels available, and usually only one sporting event on at a time. The Jets were ahead 32-29, and with 1:01 left on the game clock and football viewers in the eastern half of the nation suddenly saw a little girl on a Swiss mountain, as NBC broke away at 7:00 PM to show the television film "Heidi." During that untelevised final minute the Oakland Raiders scored two touchdowns, snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. The response of outraged fans was swift and vociferous across the nation, shutting down the NBC telephone switchboard, and most expressed in terms I can't quote from the pulpit. On Monday's CBS Evening News, Harry Reasoner announced, "And now for the result of the Raiders-Jets game: Heidi married the goat-herder."

If you are not a football fan, you might think this was all much ado about nothing. But all of us *can* relate to that part of human nature that wants to know *how things will turn out in the end*, especially when you are passionately involved in the drama or the contest or the event! Well, I believe the context of our Gospel reading this morning is that Jesus' disciples wanted to know how *their* story was going to come out. This was so much more than a football game, they were passionately and personally involved in this; they had each sacrificed and risked much to follow Jesus, and this drama was real life! They asked (verse 8), "Teacher, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" Implied is, "How is it going to turn out for us?" Jesus goes on to tell them, in so many words, "Things will get rough, very rough, so you be rough and ready!" He foretells hardship for His disciples. He tells them Jerusalem and the Temple will be destroyed (*which does happen forty years later!*), He tells them they are going to be arrested and persecuted, handed over to the synagogues and prisons and brought before kings and governors because of their association with Jesus. Some will even be killed. But Jesus tells them not to fear. He tells them, in so many words, "Be like Zachary Taylor. Be like Martin Rinkart. (He doesn't really say that, but use your imagination!). "Be rough and ready. Stand ready, do your duty, hang tough, be joyful, stay faithful in all circumstances, pray continually, be thankful and I will be with you." He promises He will give them words to speak. He tells them their hardship will be turned into an occasion of witness. He wanted them to know that even though things would get rough, that no matter what happened, God would use their sufferings in a GOOD way. And we know from church history conflict constantly surrounded the disciples' ministries, just as Jesus had warned; as most of you know, all the disciples except one went on to meet a martyr's death ... but they went on to change the world. In a nutshell, I think Jesus wanted to tell His followers (*including us!*) that no matter how rough things get, there is *meaning* to your life. There is *purpose*. There is a God who can help turn negatives into positives, tragedies into triumphs, heartaches into hallelujahs ... and most importantly, in the end this God will *triumph*. It will end well, so stay faithful. Hang tough. Be rough and ready to live and love as God would have you live and love in the time you have. On a related note, I like what I read recently on a Facebook meme: "Only God can turn a mess into a message, a test into a testimony, a trial into a triumph, a victim into a victory" In the long run, we are on the winning side. I refer you to your bulletin cover, which has the appropriate Thanksgiving verse of Colossians 2:6-7: "Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith, and overflowing with thanksgiving."

Let's stand and join together in a Litany of Thanksgiving found on your inserts:



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