

## ***“Saying Grace”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, November 9, 2014

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

### **Holy Scriptures: Psalm 107**

#### **Saying Grace**

Psalm 107 is our word of thanksgiving for deliverance from many troubles.

Listen to the Psalm's opening:

*1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.*

*2 Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble 3 and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.*

*4 Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; 5 hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.*

*6 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; 7 he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town.*

*8 Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.*

*9 For God satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.*

Speak!

Name and claim your blessings aloud.

Bear witness!

Give an accounting of your rescue.

Testify!

Be an example for others so that they, too, may receive blessings and rescue.

We who gather for worship and praise and thanksgiving have stories to tell.

We have stared into the abyss.

We've faced our fears;

sometimes our fears won, momentarily;

and sometimes we overcame them.

We have sat in utter darkness in the middle of the day,

and we've had sleepless nights.

In the stillness

our souls spoke to us when our mind was on overload and the pain unbearable,

and the Spirit of God offered spiritual guidance and grace.

The Spirit sighed and spoke,

saying that the true source of help and hope is Jesus Christ,

and he is with you,

and nothing can separate you from the love of  
God in Christ Jesus.

So when all else failed and fell apart and our troubles took center  
stage,

we finally turned to God for rescue.

Hey, remember the times we cried aloud to the highest heavens

and to anyone who would listen:

*Lord, help me!*

*Lord, have mercy!*

*Why me, Lord! Why me?*

Yes, we've got stories to tell.

God did, indeed, hear our cries.

God did respond, did act, did love, did care, did come down,

did walk with us and talk with us and call us God's own.

In Psalm 107 there is no hesitation

between God's hearing our cry for help and God's act of  
deliverance.

*6 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and God  
delivered them from their distress...*

Grace is love in action.

The grace of God delivered us, again and again and again.

God redeemed you from trouble; God liberated, freed, rescued you from trouble.

The Trouble the Psalmist speaks of

may be defined as a tight, restrictive space.

We look in our rear view mirrors

and recall when our lives felt claustrophobic.

Trapped, cornered, unsure of where to turn, feeling helpless and hopeless.

Now we can breathe, but then even the air was tight and rare.

Now we can testify that God came, God saw, and God conquered.

Trouble will come again, yet we also know that God is close by,

close enough to hear our cries and deliver us,

close by to rescue and redeem us.

Anne Lamott said, “You can get the monkey off your back,

but the circus never leaves town”

*(Grace (Eventually): Thoughts on Faith)*

**Saying Grace**

God has gathered

God has brought you home, in from exile, in from the cold and cold hearted

God has brought us together to give thanks, to say grace.

Giving thanks and saying grace are intertwined

in the language of our culture and church.

Another word for communion is Eucharist, which means thanks giving.

To say *thank you* in Spanish one must say, “Gracias!”

The more grateful we are the nearer we draw to the embodiment of grace.

Rowan Atkinson plays the mime character Mr. Bean.

In a film about Mr. Bean’s trip to France,

a Parisian asked him if he wanted cream in his coffee. “*Oui!*”

“*And would you like sugar?*”

“*No.*”

“*You speak wonderful French.*” she said,

to which Mr. Bean answered, “*Gracias!*”

**Saying Grace**

*In 2011, National Public Radio*

*aired an interview with retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Max Voelz*

*remembering his wife, Staff Sgt. Kim Voelz.*

*Kim was killed while disarming an improvised explosive device (IED) in 2003.*

*Here, in an update to that interview,*

*Max talks to Sgt. Mary Dague, a fellow bomb tech*

*who helped him cope.*

Retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Max Voelz and his wife, Staff Sgt. Kim Voelz, served in Iraq in the Army's elite bomb squad. She died working on an incident Max says he sent her on, and she was in a medically induced coma when he arrived at the hospital. The nurses there told him to talk to her, insisting...that people who came out of comas often remembered hearing things that people said.

"I mean, what are you going to tell your wife who is dying? That you love her, and you don't want her to die. But I knew she was dead a long time before the doctors stopped working on her. You hold someone's hand, and then it feels different."

They [had] married when Max was 25, and their plan was to retire from the Army. When he first talked to StoryCorps in 2011, he said, "I'm 36, and I still don't have a plan," Max says. "I am an Army widower. I don't think there's very many of us. And when I receive a condolence letter from a high-ranking government official that says, 'Mrs. Voelz, we're sorry for the loss of your husband,' it just makes it seem like nobody knows we exist."

At one of Max's lowest points, he turned to another bomb tech, Sgt. Mary Dague, who lost both of her arms in Iraq.

"I was in a pretty dark spot at the time, and another bomb tech thought that talking to you would help, and it did," Max says in the StoryCorps update. It took him awhile to open up, but then, Max says, he wouldn't stop talking.

"I'm OK with that," Mary says. "I really just wanted to reach through the computer and hug you. Like, 'It's OK.' Well, 'It's not OK, but it'll get better.' You do seem a lot happier."

"I'm glad. I am," he says. "I mean, I'm always gonna have the can't-sleep and the nightmares. ...You have a gift of helping people who are depressed. Where does your attitude come from?"

Mary said, "When I was young I was very soft. I cried a lot. And right after high school, I was engaged, and his mom pulled me into the kitchen making dinner one day and was like, 'Don't worry, Mary, I'm going to train you to be the perfect housewife.' It scared the hell out of me. I joined the Army like a week later."

She lost her arms in 2007 after getting a call for an IED that the Iraqi army had picked up.

"I got it in the truck and I laid it down in there, and it started to roll off, and I went to grab it and it detonated," she says. "I could hear this woman screaming and screaming, and then I realized that it was me."

Max asked her, "What kind of stuff do you have to deal with on a daily basis because of your injuries?"

"I'll tell you, the worst part is I've never really liked being the center of attention. And now you have a big sign on your forehead. I have quite the collection of T-shirts. They say things like 'Worst Drummer Ever.' I have one that's got a big thumbs-up and says 'Thumb Wrestling Champion.' "

"I guess the way I look at it is, yeah, I lost my arms, and I'm mostly deaf, my face is scarred..."

"[Yet] all of that has led to some really amazing opportunities, and I've helped a lot of people," she says. "I don't know if I could lead a happier life now."

## **Saying Grace**

Disciples preacher and teacher Dr. Fred Craddock once said,

"[Above all, I urge you to be grateful.]

Of all the virtues, if I could have selected just one for my children,

I would have asked God to make them grateful.

People who are genuinely grateful are never greedy or jealous,



never bitter or small;

not self-centered or hateful.

If they are able to see every day as a gift from God

and see what they have not as their own,

but as what God has given them for a while,

they are what we call gracious people.

To be gracious, you must first be grateful.

I hope that you are grateful."

One Thanksgiving in the 1960s my friends Belen and Pepin Cintron gathered together

their children and cousins and aunts and uncles for the Thanksgiving meal.

Celebrating their Puerto Rican - American heritage,

their table was overflowing with *arroz con pollo* (rice and chicken),

plantains, *pezcado* (fish), and so forth.

As they gathered in a circle around the table, smiles and joy filled the home.

Pepin said, "Let us return thanks to God for the many blessings

the Lord has given us in this past year. Who would like to say grace?"

Little Cecilia, all of four years old, perked up and said, "I'll say grace."

Surprised, they reverently bowed their heads and closed their eyes.

In the quiet peace of the moment

a small child's voice sang out, "Graaaaaace!"

We who have been redeemed and rescued from trouble have a story to tell.

Say grace.

Give thanks.

Give life and body to the concluding words of Psalm 107:

“Let those who are wise give heed to these things,  
and consider the steadfast love of the Lord.”

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*