

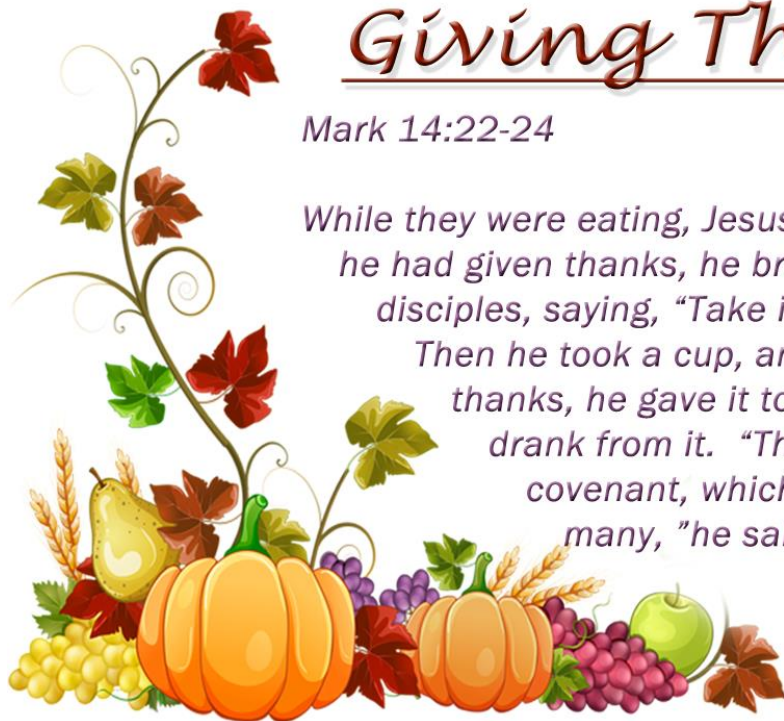
November 24, 2024      “Giving Thanks”

Mark 14:22-24

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## Giving Thanks

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Special Music:      “Thank You Jesus”

Hillsong Worship

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHaQDS1\\_uvA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHaQDS1_uvA)

## **THANKSGIVING REVEALED**

Donna stood shivering in the rain outside the toolshed. She was not one to take advantage of others, but she was so wet and very cold. Never would she have gone up to the main house and asked for help. Lightning streaked across the sky followed by a loud thunderclap. She was barely able to see through the downpour. She apprehensively tried the doorknob, half expecting the shed to be locked, but to her surprise the door opened, and she stepped inside.

The shed wasn't very large, but big enough to contain a variety of tools and farm implements, as well as a lawn tractor. It was still cold inside, but she laid her pack on the floor and took off her soaked jacket. Her car had stalled out a few miles away. She had probably run out of gas. Donna had been so frightened and frustrated when the car died, and the rainclouds moved in. She thought if she just got out and walked, she might find someone who would let her use a phone. But as she walked the rain started coming down and she realized how futile that would be. Who was she going to call? She had pretty much burned all her bridges when she left New Mexico. Her husband John had struck her with his fist again, and she just couldn't take it anymore. While he was sleeping off another drunk, she packed what she could into a backpack and drove away without looking back. She didn't even have a plan on how to move forward. She just wanted to get away. Donna used what money she had to get this far. She still had her credit cards but was afraid to use them, thinking John might be able to trace her.

There was a light switch in the toolshed and Donna flipped it on. The single light bulb didn't do much to illuminate the room, but it was better than being in the dark. With a heavy sigh, she sank to the floor, she tried to wring the water out of her wet jacket so she could use it as a pillow, but she quickly gave up realizing it was useless. Instead, she laid her head on a bag of fertilizer to try and get some rest. Donna hadn't realized how tired she was, and it didn't take her long to fall asleep. She hoped that things would look better in the morning.

Meanwhile, Inside the house, Katie Calloway and her two daughters were doing the kitchen prep for tomorrow's feast. They were so looking forward to Thanksgiving. It had been a hard year, and they were just barely getting by. The incident with Jeff Appleton accidentally burning down the tool shed had put her behind in her work. Although Speedy had rebuilt the shed with a lot of help from Myron MacIntosh, she still had too much work to get done by herself. Her neighbors had pitched in, but the Calloway family was still getting by on a wing and a prayer.

Katie had overspent on Thanksgiving, but she was going to make sure that her daughters, Jackie and Brenda, would see that there was always something to be grateful for. Jackie was kneading pie dough which would rest in the fridge overnight. Brenda was making the cornbread for the dressing. And Katie was making cranberry salad. She loved the fact that the girls liked working in the kitchen with her and was so pleased that their cooking skills were starting to rival her own.

Brenda placed the cornbread batter into the greased pans and then placed the pans into the oven to bake. She then went to the sink to wash up. Running her hands under the warm water, she happened to glance out the window at the pouring rain. Something caught her eye.

“Mama, would come and look? Because of the rain, I can just barely make it out. But it looks like the light in the tool shed is on,” said Brenda.

“What are you talking about, girl?” Katie replied as she made her way to the sink. “There’s no reason that light should be on. It must be your eyes playing tricks on you.”

“No. Look. Right over there. I’m sure the light is on.”

Katie stood behind her daughter and looked out the window to see if she could see anything. “Nah. It’s just your imagination. How could you see anything through all this rain anyway?”

“Look again, Mama, please?” Brenda pointed her finger. “See?”

Katie looked again and saw that it was true. There was a faint light coming from the direction of the tool shed. “Well, girl. I guess you are right. But what do you expect me to do about it? You don’t think that I am going to go out there in this rain just to turn it off, do you?”

“But what if someone is out there, mama? Can I go out and turn the light off?”

**“Don’t be silly, Child. There is no reason to go getting yourself soaked. We can turn it off in the morning after the rain stops,” said Katie.**

**“But mama...”**

**“No buts, young lady. I need you to start peeling the onions.”**

**“Okay, mama,” Brenda said reluctantly.**

**Katie never heard her daughter put on her boots and raincoat, then sneak out the door. Brenda trudged through the rain to the toolshed, mud sucking at her boots with every step. Lightning cracked through the clouds. Thunder roared. The rain was still coming down hard. She opened the door to the tool shed and started to turn off the light when she saw the huddled mass of Donna lying on the floor. The woman was soaked to the bone and shivering while she tried to sleep. Brenda cautiously walked over to her and shook her shoulder.**

**“Hey, are you okay?” she said.**

**“What?” Donna replied drowsily. “Who are you?” She tried to move away from the young girl that had awakened her.**

**“What are you doing here?” said Brenda. “Do you need help?”**

**“No one can help me. Go away please. Let me go back to sleep and I will leave first thing in the morning. I’m sorry if I have caused you any trouble, but please, just let me be.”**

**“That’s not going to happen. You are a mess. You need to come with me so we can get you warmed up. You’ll freeze to death out here. Come on. Mama will be glad to help.”**

**Slowly Donna got to her feet realizing that she was making a mess of things again. “Alright, but just for a moment so I can apologize to your mother.” She didn’t even bother to put her jacket back on. Everything was soaked so it wouldn’t have made much of a difference anyway. She picked up her pack and followed Brenda back to the house.**

**Katie was so angry when Brenda opened the door to the house. She was ready to ground her for a week. Brenda had done just what she had told her not to do. But then she saw Donna, dripping wet, muddy boots, and about as forlorn as anyone could be.**

**“Alright, little miss Brenda. Who is this that you have dragged into my house?”**

**“I don’t know, mama. I found her sleeping in the shed. She looks like she needs help. I couldn’t just leave her out there.”**

**“Mam, I am so sorry.” Said Donna. “I didn’t mean to disturb you. My car broke down up the road and I just didn’t have anywhere to go. Forgive me for intruding on your evening. I’ll just see I can make my way on into town.”**

**“You will not!” said Katie. “No one should out on a night like this. What’s your name? No, don’t tell me yet. Jackie, run get her some towels. Brenda, get a robe from my closet so she can get out of those wet clothes.”**

Katie pulled a chair over and indicated for Donna to sit down. Then she got down on the floor and started removing Donna's boots, mud and all. "I really don't know what could have brought you out on a night like this, but we are going to get you taken care of."

Jackie returned with the towels and handed one to Donna. Katie finished removing her boots and wet socks while Donna tried to dry her hair. Brenda brought the robe.

"Brenda, take... what did you say your name was?"

"Donna," the young woman answered softly.

"Show Donna to the bathroom so that she can get her a warm shower, maybe get the chill out of her bones. Jackie, you will need to sleep with Brenda tonight so that Donna can have your bed. Get her one of my gowns. They should fit her. Jackie, put her wet clothes in the washing machine. We'll wash everything as soon as soon as Donna is settled. I'll put on a pot of coffee. That is, if that is okay with you, Donna."

Confused and dazed with all the fuss over her, Donna couldn't think of anything else to do but nod.

"Good," said Katie as Brenda led Donna to the bathroom.

When Donna returned to the kitchen wearing the robe and gown, there was a bowl of hot soup waiting for her on the table, as well as some hot coffee. Katie was at the sink just finishing up getting all the mud off Donna's boots, which she

then set aside so that they could dry out. The sounds of the washing machine were coming from another area of the house.

Donna was curious that nobody was asking her any questions about how she got there. Katie made sure that she had enough to eat and then had Jackie show her to the bed so she could get some rest. How strange this all was. Once she was tucked into a warm bed with a full belly, Katie came in to check on her.

“Everything good?”

“Yes, but why are you doing all this. I am so very thankful, but you don’t even know me,” said Donna.

“I don’t need to know you to help you. Now, you get some sleep. Tomorrow is Thanksgiving and you will join us for the festivities. We are grateful that you have allowed us to help you. Good night and God bless.”

“But...”

“No buts. Just get your rest and we will talk in the morning.”

“Who does this?” Donna thought. “And who thanks the person that they are helping, even if it is a total stranger?” As confused as she was, she immediately drifted off to sleep, a thousand thank-yous on her lips.



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**It is difficult in today's world to understand the nature of giving thanks. We view giving thanks through a very narrow lens. Most of the time it is because we have been taught to do that, and we never give it another thought. Our parents teach us that we should thank people when they do nice things for us. When we say grace over our food, we thank God for his provisions. But our parents don't fail to tell us that they work hard for a living and the money that they earn is what pays for our food as well as other things. "Money don't grow on trees, ya know." Children have a hard time understanding the relational nature of gratitude. After all, if our mothers and fathers are paying for our food, clothes, and a roof over our heads, then why are we thanking God? Shouldn't we be thanking mom and dad? Thanking God for our resources often becomes something we do by rote without every really understanding or appreciating the nature of God's grace.**

**If we think that gratitude is about being thankful for what we receive, then why does Paul talk about being grateful in all things?**

**Always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Ephesians 5:20**

**16 Rejoice always,**

**17 pray continually,**

**18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ  
Jesus.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

The problem that we face as human beings is that we want to quantify our gratitude. We have difficulty in finding things to be grateful for when our situation is less than satisfactory. We don't often appreciate what God provides because we feel that it is insufficient for our needs. If life fails to provide what we think we need, then we tend to think that God isn't doing his part. That he doesn't care about us as much as we believe he should. Isn't it the same thing as growing up believing that our parents could always do more to make us happy? Our gratitude becomes a little lop-sided in the grand scheme of things because we feel God isn't paying attention and fails to live up to our standards.

If we tell God that we need transportation to get to work (secretly expecting for him to provide us with a car), and one of our neighbors offers us a bicycle, we feel shortchanged. Because of our preconceptions, we may not see that all we really need to get to work is that bicycle and that God is actually looking out for us by meeting our needs in an unexpected way. In cases like this, instead of praising God for meeting our needs, our gratitude falls short, possibly to the point of not being grateful at all, which can manifest into anger or indifference to our Creator.

**“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Matthew 6:7-8**

**“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?” Matthew 6:25**

But we do worry, which often leads to ingratitude. For some reason we feel that God should take care of us by meeting more than our needs. That somehow we deserve more than what we need. The truth is, the less we have, the more grateful we are when our needs are met. Think about Donna in our story today and how her needs were met, even though she expected nothing.

I want to point out something even more important than being grateful when God meets our needs. Can we find gratitude when God allows us to serve the people around us? Can we understand that when God provides us with excess, it may be to meet someone else's' needs? When we find we have more than what we need, do we consciously look for ways to provide for the needs of others?

Who do you think was more grateful in our story, Katie or Donna? It was obvious that Donna was in great need. But Katie was also in need. And Katie did not hesitate to jump in and meet Donna's immediate need with food, clothes, and rest, even though she herself was struggling to get by. She didn't ask Donna how she came to be in such need. She didn't judge her or send her away. She

welcomed her with open arms and a charitable heart. And, here is the important part, she found joy in being able to help. She didn't resent helping Donna. She was thankful that she was able to reach out and lift Donna from the pit of despair she was in. She was grateful that God allowed her to meet Donna's needs.

So, here we find ourselves in Thanksgiving week. Many of us will be surrounded by family and friends. There are so many reasons to be thankful for this season. And yet, the season can, and often does, leave us a bit hollow. Why is that? Can it be that we are so inwardly focused that we are blind to the needs around us? I ask us all in sincerity. Is there room at our table this season for one more? Is there someone we know or are aware of that has a need we can meet, that can reach out to and make a difference in their lives.

Have we ever thought it was a little odd that Jesus gives thanks for a bite of bread and some wine after having already participated in the Passover meal? After all, hadn't it already been blessed? Or is it even about the bread and the wine? What an evening it must have been for the disciples as Jesus washed their feet, ate the Passover meal with them, gave them this treasured moment at the table which would become known as the Lord's supper, and then sang and prayed with them before leaving to go to the garden to fulfill his purpose?

Let me share how I feel about what is happening at that table and what Christ is thankful for. The Communion Table is a representation of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is the moment when we all enter into a new covenant with our Creator. It isn't about being grateful for the bread and wine, but about what it represents. Jesus is grateful that he has body and

**blood to offer up as a sacrifice for our sins. He is thankful for the opportunity to become the source of salvation for all humankind. When he tears that bread and lifts that cup, he is giving thanks to God, showing his gratitude that his Heavenly Father is using his death and resurrection to bring about a new covenant between humanity and God, one that can never be broken and is available to all.**

**When we sit down Thursday to that Thanksgiving meal with family and friends, let us remember the greatest thing to be thankful for, which is the gracious love of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Let us remember the price that was paid at Calvary so that we can have a right relationship with our Creator. Let us remember that Christ rose again on the third day after paying that price, defeating death, and bringing us eternal life. Let us remember just how much God loves each of us, even in our pettiness and selfishness. Let us remember that we are the embodiment, the hands and feet of Jesus Christ, meeting the needs of world around us as God presents us with the opportunities and resources to meet those needs. For there is no greater thing to be thankful for than to be used by our Creator to serve his children.**

**God bless you all!**

**Amen**

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