HAS THERE EVER BEEN A TIME LIKE THIS - THANKSGIVING
PSALM 103 / JOHN 15:1-17
2026-1011

It seems impossible we've gone from Labour Day to Thanksgiving in no time at all! Many of you may have family gatherings planned later in the day—or maybe not.

Probably most of you at one time or another have had a conversation about **when might have been the best time to live.** You may have longed to live in Israel when Christ walked among His creation. You may have loved to be around in Europe when the Reformation was happening with all the excitement around the church at that time. You may have longed to be a part of one of the many great times of spiritual awakening in the 18th or 19th centuries. You may romanticize about the time when horses and not cars were the means for getting around. You may simply wish to be part of a time that didn't stress you with social media and technology that keeps exceeding your efforts to keep up!

But then you may think about creature comforts like indoor plumbing, ease of travel by car, plane, train or transit, or electricity or all the recent audio-visual-technical advances—including seat-warmers in cars and wonder how you could ever live without any of them!

T**he average person,** at least in the West, has never lived so well. All the comforts that we take for granted simply didn't exist at all in the past or what ones did exist were only for the very well-to-do. Now **I recognize that's not the case for the poor.** The plight of the poor in the underdeveloped world or in the West is often desperate. Over a billion people on the planet have no assurance where their next meal is coming from, if it is coming at all. But for most of us, that is not our common experience. We have the privilege of being able to give a hand up for those in need—locally and through missional givings. And you have been very generous.

So here's the question. For all the benefits we have, for all the blessings, are we better off? More grateful? Or have we slipped into a quagmire of "life would be better if only…"? Do you slip into the grumblies? When surveys are taken on such things, Canada, the U.S. and Europe come out way down the list among those who are happy. I remember hearing Ghana, of all places, had the happiest people in the world—not exactly a world power or wealthy by any material measure. But we know that money does not equate to happiness. If that were so, the divorce rate among the wealthy should be low or nonexistent, not the other way around.

Yet Jesus, who isn't often noted about this, **wants us to be happy**. The beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount are about our happiness. Wherever the word "blessed" appears, it can also be translated "happy". His list isn't likely our list: happy are the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, those who are pure in heart, peacemakers and those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

So what about being blessed? Will that make us happy, even thankful? We've heard Psalm 103 this morning. What a beautiful and powerful Psalm it is! "*Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me, bless His holy Name! Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all His benefits! But we can never remember all those benefits!"*

What are the benefits God gives us? Why should we be thankful? The Psalm lists 6 things God does for us: **He forgives us**, **He heals us, He redeems us, He crowns us, He satisfies us and He renews us**. That's an impressive list! **Charles Spurgeon says** this Psalm is like a Bible in itself. God provides the just law court, the hospital, frees us from the slave market, reveals and gives us His throne room and provides the banquet hall (**Alexander Whyte**).

And then there's the list of reasons for thanksgiving:

1. God judges in favour of all who are oppressed.
2. God makes His way known to Moses and to us—His habits—so we can be like God
3. He gives us the story of our past. (we have roots and therefore we have purpose)
4. God is full of compassion and is gracious—that's the very first thing said about what God is.
5. God is slow to anger and His mercy is always abundant/abounds.
6. God doesn't always chide us or continue to find fault in/with us. (Someone getting 98%; someone else says what happened to the other 2%—our own or others' need for perfection)
7. God doesn't stay angry forever. (with some people, you can never get out of jail)
8. God hasn't dealt with us like our sins deserve. He hasn't dealt with us only on grounds of justice…grace
9. God's mercy overflows to us.
10. God has removed our sins from us completely—as far as the east is from the west. We have complete forgiveness. (not like I will forgive but not forget—like never forgiving)
11. God treats us with kindness and mercy like we are His own children—which we are!
12. God knows and remembers that we are dust, that we're easily broken, frail.
13. God's mercy is forever—from everlasting to everlasting!
14. God's righteousness is to/for our children's children.
15. God's throne is established in the heavens. It cannot be shaken.
16. God's kingdom rules over all. None are too poor or small; none are too great or strong.

The Psalm closes with praise—praise from the angels, praise from all His works. David didn't know how much He had to thank God about. **At the end of the Psalm he's singing to his own soul, summoning praise and thanks to God. Can you feel that in your own soul too?**

Thanksgiving. A time of harvest. A time of blessing. A time of reflection and rejoicing. John 15: The Vine and the Branches. A look at the harvest.

Jesus takes an Old Testament metaphor and applies it to Himself. **Jesus is the vine. God the Father is the gardener**. **Vines go one of two ways: they either flourish and produce**

lots of fruit or they wither and sap energy out of the vine, making it less fruitful overall. So vines must be pruned to make the harvest richer, more plentiful. There are people who want nothing to do with Jesus. They want to do their own thing away from the vine. But they will wither. There are also Christians who don't stay attached to the vine and drift away from Christ. They too are withering. But the one who stays close to Christ, attached right to Him will flourish. And the closer you stay, the more you will be pruned and the more bountiful your harvest will be. If you want to be fruitful for God, you have to stay close to Him. You have to have a personal relationship with Him every day—starting in prayer and listening to Him and talking with Him every day. Don't let Him out of your thoughts, out of your heart, out of your sight—just like you keep a relationship with a close friend or family member. **If you abide in Christ (draw near to God and He will draw near to you—James 4:8) you will bear much fruit; apart from Him you can't do anything**. The only thing that can save you is to have an intimate living fellowship with Me, for I am the vine of God and you must be branches joined to Me. Not Jewish blood but faith in Him is the way to God's salvation. No external qualification can set us right with God; only the friendship of Jesus can do that.

The vine still grows all over Palestine. It is a plant that needs a great deal of attention if the best fruit is to be got out of it. Wherever it is grown, careful preparation of the soil is essential. It grows luxuriantly and drastic pruning is necessary. A young vine is not allowed to fruit for the first three years and each year it is cut back drastically to develop and conserve its life and energy. The vine cannot produce the crop of which it's capable without drastic pruning. Branches that don't produce fruit are useless—words without deeds.

It glorifies God when you remain in Christ, showing yourself to be His disciple. The closer you are to Jesus, the more you'll be like Him and that is what will cause others to see Him. Abiding in Christ. We must keep contact with Jesus. We cannot do that unless we take steps to deliberately do that.

The centre of this is: Just as the Father has loved Jesus, so He has loved us. Jesus urges us to remain in His love: nestle in with Him. You remember Jesus wants us to be happy? Look at verse 11: "**I've told you this** (remain close to me/ abide in Me and in My love) **so** My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete/full/abundant." His command is that you and I love one another as He has loved us. and how great is His love? Nothing is greater than that He laid down His life for His friends. Jesus has done that for every one of us. We're no longer servants. He's told us what He's about—that's what friends do. And He's chosen us to be His letter carriers, His ambassadors. He chose us; we did not choose Him. He's appointed us to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.

So today we give you thanks for so many blessings; we give you thanks for the bountiful harvest—but then we look at what you accomplish in and through us and recognize we too are your harvest. May it be an abundant harvest, a full harvest, a complete harvest. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask according to Jesus' will.

Love each other. Others will notice. If that doesn't make you thankful every day, for all God has done and continues to do—for you, for me and for those yet strangers to His grace, then give your head a shake. Share that today and through the week with others.