

WD November 20, 2023

“Giving Thanks for Humble Service”

Ever notice the credits of any movie all the hundreds of names that are listed to make the movie actually happen? Stunt people; sound people; caterers; trainers; all on a list that floats by on the screen as we switch the channel to find another movie. They make the movie happen. All of their different talents and skills are applied to a create a mutual goal to tell a story.

I would offer two things this thanksgiving week. First, the people behind the scenes deserve our thanks. And they are everywhere. Go to the hospital or even a doctor’s office there is someone cleaning those rooms. Give thanks for them. Without them the surgical rooms aren’t sanitary the garbage overflows and things smell bad. Give thanks for the stock crew at the grocery store who unload the trucks or the truck driver that delivers fuel to the gas station. Give thanks to the mechanic who works on our car or changes our windshield if is broken. Or the dishwasher person at the restaurant. The nasty forks full of food, the dirty plates. I could go on and on. Give thanks for the ones behind the scenes making it better for us.

Give thanks for those who work behind the scenes at church. Give thanks for the guys that run the cameras for church service or the screens so we can follow along. Give thanks for those who clean our bathrooms, vacuum the sanctuary, repair our tiles, and change lightbulbs, and mow the grass. Those who count the monies that help pay the bills. Those put together the communion for church and take it down after service. Those who put together the slides on the screens for Sunday service. Those who visit other members and send cards. Those who help with the kids on Wednesdays and happily prepare crafts for VBS. Those who help prepare and run VBS and volunteer for our annual turkey supper or the annual Maple Syrup Festival. Parents who make sure their kids are in Confirmation and in worship. Those who prepare coffee and help put together funeral dinners. Those who usher. Those who serve on our many ministry teams. Those who play music, sing, and offer their talent for worship. Those who serve meals every week for Grace on Wednesday. Those who make sure the preschool kids all get to their classrooms and find their parents afterward. I give thanks for those who gladly and faithfully work behind the scenes. Without them so much of what we do wouldn’t happen. Like a movie being made the goal is to give attention to the star, namely Jesus above all else. The goal is to work together with the goal of telling the message of the Gospel.

Those who work behind the scenes are the first thing I give thanks or today. The second thing I give thanks for is how our Lord works behind the scenes for our benefit. Romans 8:28 tells us, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” One may only guess what the Lord is doing for us behind the scenes but know that it for our good.

Perhaps a most notable example of God working behind the scenes is in the life of Joseph. He brothers sell him into slavery. He ends up being sold in Egypt where he works for Potiphar. As he does he learns the language and the culture. He is then accused of rape and sent to prison. There he interprets the dreams of Pharaoh’s baker and cup bearer. At this point the stage is set and Joseph is made ready for the work God has been preparing for. Finally, Joseph is brought before Pharaoh and interprets his dreams. It earns Joseph a place as Pharaoh’s right hand man and puts him in a position to save his family who eventually make their way to Egypt to survive the famine. In the end the plan is revealed to Joseph and his brothers. Genesis 50:20, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” The good was being done even in the midst of so much that wasn’t good.

Consider the book of Esther. Esther becomes queen to Ahasuerus (Xerxes). By this point the remnant of Israel had returned to Judah from the Exile. Keep this in mind. Haman, an advisor to the King hated the Jews and convinced the king to write a decree that would allow the people of Persia to kill the Jews—this would have wiped out the remnant in Judah as well. We learn from Nehemiah that the locals were none too happy that the Jews were returning to rebuild the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. They had gotten used to having the place to themselves. It would have been very appealing to be authorized to simply kill them. So, Esther reveals the plot to the king and in the end the remnant is saved. The whole book is an example of how the Lord works behind the scenes to bring good to His people.

Psalms 121 says, “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” And then says six times, “the Lord watches over you... He neither sleeps nor slumbers... watching over your coming and going

now and forevermore.” In 1 Kings 6 when the King of Aram surrounded the town of Dotham with an army to capture Elisha because Elisha kept giving away the King of Aram plan to kill the King of Israel. This army was sent in force. Elisha’s servant saw the army panicked. Elisha, we are told, calmly “opened the servant’s eyes” to see a vast army of angels on the hills. And with another prayer the Lord blinded the army of Aram. The best part is what happens after. The prophet leads them to Israel right into the hands of the king of Israel. However, instead of killing the army he gives the back their sight so they realize what a precarious place they were in and then throws a banquet for them. Then Elisha sent them home like they were guests who stopped by for a visit. Again, God is working behind the scenes.

The Lord God has regularly worked behind the scenes. For centuries the plan for Jesus and the cross gradually came more and more into view until finally it was fully realized. The disciples were told exactly how Jesus would die on the cross and still they did not understand Good Friday or the events of Easter morning. I only made sense once the resurrected Jesus appeared to them afterward. My sense is that something similar will happen to our wonderings and questions. It happens with Joseph and his brothers. It happens with the disciples after the resurrection. Once we meet the resurrected Jesus as He has promised to do for us much more will make sense. Most of all we will probably realize fully and finally just how much the Lord had been working behind the scenes in our own lives for our good. Until then Jesus invites us to trust in Him and to note that He is going to prepare a place for us in the Father’s house.

So, I would encourage you today to remember and give thanks for all those who work behind the scenes. And I would especially encourage thanksgiving that Jesus Himself is still watching and working behind the scenes for our good, the greatest good—our salvation. May the Lord bless you Thanksgiving this week knowing just how much the Lord is with you and for you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Thanks to all who do so much for the rest of us.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30