

11.20.22 – Pentecost 24
“The Fragrance of Thanksgiving”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 69:16-18, 29-26 (NIV) ~ Pam

¹⁶ Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. ¹⁷ Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble. ¹⁸ Come near and rescue me; deliver me because of my foes. ²⁹ But as for me, afflicted and in pain—may your salvation, God, protect me. ³⁰ **I will praise God’s name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.** ³¹ **This will please the Lord more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hooves.** ³² The poor will see and be glad—you who seek God, may your hearts live!

³³ The Lord hears the needy and does not despise his captive people. ³⁴ Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them, ³⁵ for God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah. Then people will settle there and possess it; ³⁶ the children of his servants will inherit it, and those who love his name will dwell there.

L: These are David’s Words to God. All: Thanks be to God!

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 (NLT)

¹⁴ But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ’s triumphal procession. **Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume.** ¹⁵ **Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing.** ¹⁶ To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. **But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume.** And who is adequate for such a task as this? ¹⁷ You see, we are not like the many hucksters who preach for personal profit. We preach the word of God with sincerity and with Christ’s authority, knowing that God is watching us.

Leader: These are Holy Reminders from Paul. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Father God, today we are grateful for many things. We love you, your Son Jesus, our faith, this world you created, our families, friends, and this church. Forgive us when we complain or lose sight of our blessings. May we only smell the sweet fragrance of life itself. We thank you for leaders like David and Paul to remind us of your promises and the strength of our belief. Please be with those who cannot be here today. Now let us hear your word through this humble messenger as we give thanks. Amen.

Happy Early Thanksgiving! The nip in the air, the grocery store crowds, and the snow in upstate New York helps my mind finally believe the calendar, after such a warm month. I bring you greetings from your friends and encouragers at the BGAV (Baptist General Association of

Virginia): John Upton, Jr., the Executive Director Emeritus, Wayne Faison, the new Executive Director, Jody Faig, our Field Strategist, Kay Cumbie's daughter and parliamentarian Beth Fogg, V3, Fresh Expressions, Missio Alliance, Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry, Leland Alumni, staff and faculty, and other church pastors and leaders I met from around the Commonwealth. I was encouraged by situations similar to ours, and how the institutions are collaborating in purpose, prayer, and initiatives to spread the Gospel within and beyond the walls of the church. We are not alone; God is still at work through his people!

In the psalm, David prays to God for restoration and protection from his enemies who wished to destroy him. He was sure he was close to death as he wrote Psalm 69. Make the connection to how concerned we are *today* about many things – health, inflation, violence – and how David approached his distress. First, he prayed for help; then he praised the Lord in thanksgiving, knowing that humble gratitude was even more important than the required animal sacrifice. *[Remember that before Christ, the burned sacrifices on the temple grounds had an unforgettable fragrance that reminded the Jewish people of their legacy and gratitude to God.]* David anticipated that God would save the nation, especially the poor and needy, so he called for universal prayer among the people. For us, isn't that an appropriate place to start, in prayer for our troubles, both personally and as a church? Are you praying? Are you praying for the church in general?

As the holidays approach, aren't we to praise God and be thankful even when we might be in pain or fear, emotional or physical? This is a tall order for most believers and almost impossible for non-believers. We are saddened almost to despair when we saw the Idaho violence, the plane

crash in Peru, another hate-based shooting in Colorado at an LGBTQ nightclub, and people we love dying from natural causes. Some may ask “how do we celebrate a Thanksgiving meal when so much is wrong or hateful?” My friend’s brother couldn’t attend his mom’s funeral last week because he had COVID and had to isolate. Families like the Rockholts are having large meals together before Thanksgiving in both sadness and some joy, but without their mom.

Have you ever had a horrible Thanksgiving? Not to dwell on sadness, but many people are in hard times right now; we *will* get through it. How do you celebrate a day of gratitude when you might not be joyful? Or you might be angry at God for something. Some years, our effort is to give food to those in need, and I encourage you to continue bringing ACCA non-perishable supplies as you can. This year, I suggest that we also pray for those struggling through grief and a sense of overwhelm with the world’s problems. God can and does heal those who are angry or confused about his love and mercy or are dismayed by His timing. **We are an amazingly resilient people!** So, as you go around the table this year for Thanksgiving, reflecting on things for which you are grateful, let us also share a favorite memory of someone who is not at the table – who represents the empty chair. The enemies in our world, like the psalmist, can be literal or figurative, human, or contextual. We must let those enemies go by forgiving them in Christ. Healing and gratitude begin there. What a great motivation for Thanksgiving – forgiveness!

In our second passage, Paul was preparing to travel to Corinth for his third visit and had concerns about the church and his own suffering there or the possibility of someone killing him. Apostolic ministry (i.e.,

starting a new church or ministry and seeing it continue) is not for the faint of heart. It takes a calling, courage, hope, and persistence. The example that came to mind was the lady Mrs. Quinlen who started the Special Ed program at First Baptist Church of Annandale and Erma and Rocky, the Hall family, Martha, and Bob who all helped it continue as long as it was needed and practical. The stories we heard on Thursday at Erma's service illustrate that ministry was both a love and a challenge. Our folks and (as we hear in the Scripture) Paul turn to God in prayer for the supernatural ministry competence only Christ brings. His grace and mercy bring the sweet fragrance to our lives.

2 Corinthians is viewed as a single unified letter but was a combination of several to a troubled and divided church. Like some families' experiences, holidays magnify divisions and disagreements. Paul came to town in a procession like that which was done for military triumphs. The victors smelled success, but the captors facing prison marched at the back of the parade and anticipated the stench of death. Incense was burned ritually and practically for the odors, like we sometimes use air fresheners to cover up odors, rather than finding the source. Paul liked these metaphors; the source of our sweet fragrance is Jesus Christ! The holy lives of Christians are and should be a sweet fragrance presented by Christ (on our behalf) to God. The pleasant aroma of grace is spread by believers to believers whose hearts have been opened to it by God; unbelievers smell only death and hell. How are we to reach those and change their experience of life on earth? By sharing the Gospel of Jesus, our lives can demonstrate a sweet fragrance of Jesus' influence in our lives (even when we are down), *or* our lives can tell

others that the enemy can defeat us. I think that is what the world wonders when it witnesses Christ followers fall from grace.

A recent nurse was telling about her plans for Thanksgiving – going home to her parents and how she couldn't wait to walk through that front door and “smell the love!” She was talking about the food being prepared in the kitchen and how it permeates the home with the mouth-watering aromas of her mother's home cooking. I remember best my mother's rolls, rising on the radiators, then cooking in the oven. When I came home from college, I knew, walking in the door because of the smells, what we were having for turkey-day. Do we sense the same thing when we come into the church? Do we notice the fragrances of activity, joy, and grace, or the musty smells of neglect, complacency, or grief? Some churches have the stagnant aroma of division or infighting; they have forgotten the sweet fragrance of our Lord who makes all things new.

In our gratitude for today and those who've gone before us, let us remember their legacy and use Christ's love, mercy, and grace they so richly invested to spur us on to rebuild new legacies, fresh expressions of church, and sweet remembrances of Christ's spiritual gifts endowed upon us. Making an ordinary decision to follow Jesus in all aspects of our lives yields extraordinary results! Making ordinary moves to be an example to others brings extraordinary faith for others (you may never see it, but you can plant seeds). Will you be a sweet fragrance of Thanksgiving this year? We had a rule in my family – no political talk at the table, no money talk at the table, and no religious judgment at the table. There are plenty of other subjects, like the delicious aromas of food and faith, love, and mercy. Take time to prepare your heart as well as your food. Amen! |/

Will you pray with me? Faithful God, thank you for these reminders of gratitude and choice. May our faith and love be more obvious to others than our suffering or pain. Help us to continue to listen for your work and find ways to act on your guidance. Bring peace to our world and grace to our hearts in all we say and do around each other, especially at this holiday. We humbly ask these things, in Jesus' name, **Amen**.