

SERMON - THE 7TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY - 6 JULY 2008
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

1 Thes. 5:17-18 (KJV)

Pray without ceasing. ¹⁸In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

In everything give thanks. This means in everything give thanks, the bad as well as with the good, the times in the valley as well as the times on the mountain tops. In everything, at all times Paul might as well have said, give thanks.

Then he goes on to say *for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

To quote ***John 6:60 (ESV)*** "*This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?*"

It is a hard saying. It is even more hard to do to, to give thanks for everything. Particularly when you are angry with God for the thing that has been handed you.

How do you give thanks when you are terminated from your job, maybe one that you have had with your employer for twenty-five years?

How do you give thanks when your home is foreclosed because you lost that job and you can't afford to make the payments?

How do you give thanks when someone you love so deeply has been handed a disastrous disease?

And how can you say, *for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

It is hard for me to think that God deliberately and maliciously wills cancer or any other disease on us. It is hard for me to think that God, who is ultimate Love, would capriciously do any thing that is so cruel.

For many years I heard those same words uttered by many of my patients and members of their families and the only thing I had to offer was, I really don't know but I can't believe that God's hand is in this.

When God gave man free will he also gave him, after the fall of Adam, disease and death. If man, if Adam, had not disobeyed God we would not be discussing this issue today.

We Christians do not have a God that manipulates us. We have a God that allows us to make our own conscience decisions to obey Him or not, to love Him or not.

We do not have the fatalistic view of God, *insha'allah, it is God's will*, that Islam has.

But when we handed "stuff", when we are handed "stuff" we are to still give him thanks.

Why?

Because, first of all, what Paul is talking about is that *for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you* does not mean that God has willed this on us but rather that God wills that we recognize the fact that His Grace will give us the strength to endure and overcome any circumstance that will come our way.

In other words, no matter what, God is still there, God is still there to strengthen us, to comfort us, to sustain us through whatever may happen to us and we should give Him thanks for this support.

It is God's will that we give Him thanks, not God's will that we have been handed those difficulties.

Remember those words of Paul **2 Cor. 12:9 (KJV)** *And God said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore*

will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

God does not ask us to be strong. God does not ask us to be self-reliant. But God does ask us to recognize the fact that He is always with us and that he will never leave to face this world with it's evil, it's disease, it's hates and it's wars, alone and to give Him thanks for this.

Lets don't forget the last words of Jesus when He gave us the Great Commission,
Matthew 28:20 (KJV) and, *lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*

It's times like these when I remember Thomas Merton's words, Therefore I will trust
You always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for You are ever with me,
and You will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Oh! I forgot to comment on the first part of the passage I am using today.

Pray without ceasing.

Enough said.

Amen.