

The Secret

Thanksgiving Reflections

Text: Philippians 4: 10- 13

Rev. Dr. C. Geordie Campbell

November 18, 2018

*Life is amazing.
And then it's awful.
And then it's amazing again.*

*And in between
the amazing and the awful
it can be so ordinary, mundane and routine.*

*So breathe in
the amazing, hold on through
the awful, and stay steadfast with the ordinary.*

*That's the choice
in the mix and muddle of life arriving.
And, all in all, in the end it's breathtakingly beautiful!*

I hope you can hear . . . the echo of those brief verses across the waters of your life. It's a stanza of poetry that happened onto my Facebook site just last week. It bears a near perfect fit as Thanksgiving comes around again.

The simple lines reveal this truth: life rarely shows up pure and perfect. It comes to us in a blend: amazing sometimes and awful other times; mundane here and extraordinary there; heartbreaking and life-giving.

The poem also hints at a secret - that mature life requires the daily work of balancing and choosing how we receive and respond to what is given; what we decide to focus on; how we will be; and what we will see along our different ways.

Did you know that in 1621 . . . the Pilgrims actually discussed how to mark their first year in this land?ⁱⁱ Of course, as in all of life, history never shows up in pure and perfect ways either. And there were so many layers to their story that we just don't know.

Still, they had survived eleven months of struggle. A wide ocean separated them from home. Half of them died of illness and disease since their arrival. In such light, some of them felt that a day of mourning was in order in deference to those who had passed on.

Add to their burden the fear that the winter out ahead could be harder yet. The most attentive among them knew this. Many would enter the second winter still worn down by the first. And some among them, again, would not survive.

But others in the Pilgrim Colony assessed the moment differently. They called for a day of celebration; a day of feasting in spite of their hardship; a day to thank God that goodness, grace and hope were still with them. And this is the choice that prevailed.

You have heard many times . . . how highly I regard the book Tuesdays with Morrie.ⁱⁱⁱ It is story of spiritual brilliance simply staged in weekly conversations between a teacher named Morrie who was dying from ALS and his student named Mitch.

On the second of their Tuesday visits Mitch asked, "Morrie, do you ever feel sorry for yourself?" Came the reply, "Sometimes in the mornings. I feel around my body, I move my fingers and my hands, whatever I can still move, and I mourn what I've lost. I mourn the slow insidious way in which I am dying. But then I stop."

"Just like that you stop?" Mitch asked. "Yes, just like that. I allow myself a good hard cry. But then I concentrate on all that I still have; on what's left to me. I don't allow myself to get stuck in self-pity. It gets too much in the way of what life I still have."

Mitch and Morrie were talking about the choice we all have in life; the focus of our attention; and the wisdom and understanding about how powerful our perspective and attitude matter in what is to be and become of us.

"I have learned the secret," Paul once wrote. That's what's in the letterbox of our scripture passage this morning. It's a secret that he wanted not only to impart back then but one that he wants us to learn and to live and to spread.

Let's not prettify the setting. Remember, Paul lived smack dab in the midst of the awful and the amazing. His letter was not written from a place of comfort and ease but from the captivity of prison. He was a prisoner for the Lord, history tells us.

Still the words emerged from his quill, "I rejoice in the Lord greatly. I have learned in whatever state I am in to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty."

And then he wrapped it up with one the most life balancing statements in all of the New Testament: "In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things in him who strengthens me."

Please, where-so-ever you are today . . . and whatever the shape of your story as Thanksgiving comes again this week may, we carry Paul's secret all the way to our various Thursday gatherings and feasts, our football and folly.

May we even take his ten words on as our mantra: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." Not because there is no hardship around us but because there is. And not because we don't have our own personal brand of sadness or grief but because we do.

And all the while, remember this:

*Life is amazing.
And then it's awful.
And then it's amazing again.*

*And in between
the amazing and the awful
it can be ordinary, mundane and routine.*

*So breathe in
the amazing, hold on through
the awful, and stay steadfast with the ordinary.*

*That's the choice
in the mix and muddle of life arriving.
And, all in all, in the end it's breathtakingly beautiful!*

May it ever be so. For you. And for me. And for all of us.

"Happy Thanksgiving!" (Let the gathered body say so!) And let us also say "Amen!"

© 2018 Charles Geordie Campbell

ⁱ Poem by L.R. Knost posted on Facebook, October 2018.

ⁱⁱ William Bradford (Harvey Wish ed.). Of Plymouth Plantation: The Pilgrims in America. Capricorn Books, 1962.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mitch Albom. Tuesdays with Morrie. Doubleday Books, 1997, pp. 56-56