

Calvary United Methodist Church  
March 6, 2011

**LOOK WHAT I GOT**  
**Rev. Dr. S. Ronald Parks**

Children's Sermon

Colossians 3:15-16



If there are any children within the sound of my voice who are awake, you are welcome to come forward at this time. We have good news to share.



Good morning everybody, good to see you. A couple of weeks ago I mentioned that someone who is very special in my life had a 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. My grandmother turned ninety-five way back on February 19. Something occurred to me as I was thinking about celebrating her birthday.

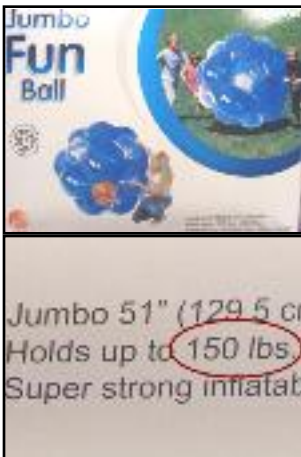


I thought about the gifts that I gave her, in addition of course to being the world's best grandson. I also gave her the gift of hard shells. We had hard shells before her birthday. She loves them. She's the one who got me first interested in them so we had a family gathering. We got a couple dozen and we cracked hard shells all evening and had a great time.



I also got her a birthday cake. I got the birthday cake at a place I go to for all of my sermon ideas—Costco. As I walked around Costco with her birthday cake I really didn't think I had anything all that fun to give her. I like to give gifts not only that you can eat; and it's nice to take people out to dinner and get things they like to eat. It's certainly a great thing to get them a cake but I saw something in Costco that I knew she would really love. It's called a Jumbo Fun Ball. Now you might not know what a Jumbo Fun Ball is and up until a couple days ago I didn't know what one was either. This is a Jumbo





Fun Ball. Now you may say, why a Jumbo Fun Ball instead of a small, medium or large fun ball--because we go for the jumbo fun around here. The cool thing about the Jumbo Fun Ball is not only that you could pass it around, but the cool thing is you can get inside it. I knew my grandmother would really enjoy this because at ninety-five she's about the most spray person I've ever seen. I thought it would be really cool to blow this up and after the second service have her get in here and we'll just roll her all around the sanctuary. What do you think? Does it sound like fun?

The problem is that the Jumbo Fun Ball has some regulations and restrictions. Can you guess what one of the restrictions might be? Age? If you look closely it says "Ages three and up." Now grandma certainly fits in the "up" category but here's the piece that is really disturbing and I didn't see it until this morning—it holds up to 150 pounds. Now I don't want to say anything about what my grandmother weighs, but if it gets close to 150 pounds there could be a problem. So I realized that probably not only shouldn't she get into it and most adults shouldn't get into it but Pastor Jeff and I can't get into it either. That was really disturbing because my thought was that we would all sort of enjoy rolling each other around here in the sanctuary. It would be cool, right? I just thought it would be a cool thing to buy one of these and bring it here and see what fun we could have with it. Frankly, coming to church and not having any fun is no fun. We want fun and we want jumbo fun—hence the Jumbo Fun Ball. So at the end of the worship service this morning I'm going to invite you guys to come back up here and take your shoes off and anything else that might have a sharp edge.

I went on the web site this morning and I actually read what some of the people who bought this said about the Jumbo Fun Ball. First of all, they flat out lie when they tell you that the hand pump that is included can inflate this in twenty minutes. I had an air compressor working on this. It took me an hour and a half to inflate the Jumbo Fun Ball.

After church is over come up here before Sunday School begins. We want some adult supervision so perhaps mom and dad can come up here with you. Take turns getting in the Fun Ball and rolling it around

being very careful not to break it. Costco doesn't open before eleven on a Sunday and I don't want to have to run over there.

Why do we want to have fun in church? Because fun—enjoying, laughing, sharing—is an expression of gratitude. It's a way for us to say thank you to God for all of the things that God has given us by enjoying them. Paul writes these words to some friends of his at one of the churches he started.



Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

Sharing your life with others brings joy, fun, laughter, jumbo fun to everybody.

And be thankful. Celebrate your life.

Your life is a party. I know there are times in life when life is not a party, when things can get kind of tough, when things can get very sad, but in everything we should be able to give thanks. This means that every day is like opening up yet another gift that God has given to us.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you. Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through prayers and songs from the Spirit. Speak and sing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Every time you pray or sing begin with these simple words. What are the words you say to someone who has given you a gift? There are two of them: the second one is you and first one is thank. Thank you God for the gift of this day. Thank you God for the opportunity to be together. Thank you God for the Jumbo Fun Ball that you guys are going to play with at the end of worship. Thank you God for all of the gifts that we get at every stage in life, whether we are very tiny or whether we have been around for ninety-five years. There are always new gifts to open and every day is like opening God's latest package. That's why every day should begin with three simple words and they are thank you God and everybody can say them.

Thanks for sharing in our time this morning. Good luck with the Jumbo Fun Ball.

Message

Luke 18:9-14



(A video is shown about Cody McCasland who is a physically challenged boy. He partakes of most sports and always has a smile on his face. Here is the text from the video. Picture from the video are available at the end of this document.)



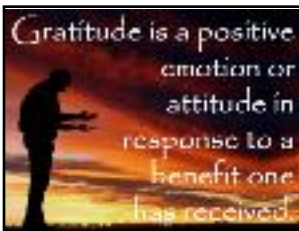
This is Cody. Due to significant complications, Cody was born two months early. Doctors told his parents that he was too weak to survive. But Cody would overcome. As Cody grew, his legs did not develop properly. At 15 months, doctors had to remove his legs. A decision that would forever limit his abilities. But Cody would overcome. Cody has had 20 surgeries and 13 pairs of legs. With every new challenge he continues to overcome. There's no doubt you have obstacles in your life. But God is ready to help you overcome them so dream big.

Dream big! If you look at the face of Cody McCasland in all of these activities that he has tried throughout the years, and believe me there are pictures of him doing things that you and I would hesitate to do with a perfectly whole and normal body, yet in everything that he does if you look closely at his face he has the same expression. Every time you see a photograph of him no matter what he is doing. Every time, no matter whether it's looking the thirteen pairs of legs he has had in the ten years of his life, or winning medals for being a challenged athlete. Look at those faces: what do they all have in common? He is smiling.



He is thankful. He is grateful. His life is limited in ways that you and I can't even imagine, and yet somehow through all of this, this young person has created a foundation that has donated more than \$100,000 to the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children—the hospital where he had all of his surgery.





He also is involved in the Challenged Athletes Foundation. He has done half marathons to raise money for them. I can't run a half marathon and I've got two legs.

But part of Cody's way of saying thank you, not only to God but to everybody else, has to do with being an inspiration to people who are currently serving in the military. This is Kevin McCloskey who heard about Cody through the internet. His finance suggested that, after he had one of his legs blown off by an IED in Afghanistan, that he might want to sit down and share a few moments with this young person. They met and they get along together famously.

Cody does everything in life with a smile because it's his way of saying thank you.

Gratitude. Gratitude is for us, when we think about it and kind of do the dictionary search of gratitude, a positive feeling. It is an emotion. It is an attitude that we find welling up in us in response to benefits, gifts, to blessings that we have all received. Gratitude is in a sense an affirmation of who we are as a person. That's why it feels good to be grateful.

It is an acknowledgment of my debt. The debt that I owe to so many people.

What do I owe? I owe my life. I owe my sustenance. I owe every circumstance of who I am the good and the bad, to the influence of those around me and to the gifts that God has placed within me. But ultimately I owe everything to God. The stuff that challenges me, the stuff that threatens me, the stuff that causes me even to suffer, in all of these things in every circumstance Paul says, "I will give thanks because I trust that gratitude is the way that God has built me to react to life, joy, thanksgiving."



But gratitude is more than a feeling. It's more than just that fuzzy thing that you get when you open a gift and turn to someone and say, "Look what I got!" There is no better remembrance that I have than my recollection of my kids growing up on Christmas morning or their birthdays when they opened a package that they didn't expect to get and it is something that thrilled them. They turn and they hold it up and they say, "Look what I got!" Now that's gratitude. Unfettered joy in response to what someone has given me.

It has to be more than just something that burns within us, something that warms our hearts. It has to be something that is expressed because gratitude is also a motive. It is the driving force that gives us a reason for thanksgiving. To give thanks, not only by what we say, not only but how we feel, not only by a perspective by which we look at our existence in life. Gratitude is the drive, it's the emotion, it's the power behind the fuel that fires the engine of being a servant of Jesus Christ.

Not everybody sees it that way though. Not everybody acknowledges the debt that they owe. Not everybody is able to turn to those around them and say, "Thank you." For some people life looks lot different. Jesus tells a story about two men that had a very different point of view on the idea of thanksgiving and gratitude.

Some who heard Jesus were unimpressed. They considered themselves good enough for God.

That's called righteousness when you are good enough for God and believing that somehow you, by yourself, are good enough for God. That's self righteousness. These people considered themselves good enough for God, more importantly better than you. Good enough for God and better than you. Do you know people like that? I do. None of them go to Calvary but I do know people like that.

So Jesus told a story. A Pharisee and a tax collector went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee, a scholar of religious law, looked up to heaven and prayed loud enough for all to hear; Thank you, God, that I am not like these other people; dishonest, unfaithful, and greedy.

Imagine being in church and having someone stand up—let's say the person right next to you. Look at them and imagine them doing this: Thank you, God I'm glad I'm not like these other people. I'm not greedy, I'm not dishonest, I'm not unfaithful and I'm not any of these things that all these other people are. Thank you, God, that I'm not like that.

Thank you, God, that I'm nothing like that tax collector over there.

The one who is hiding in the corner. The one who somehow already knows how bad he is. That's why he is in the corner. He doesn't have to be told how bad he is. He already knows how bad he is.

As you know, Lord, I fast and tithe. My obedience is an example for everyone to follow.

But the tax collector, hiding in the shadows with his face in his hands, prayed softly, "God have mercy on me, a sinner."

"This man," said Jesus "went home knowing and appreciating the gift God had given him."

That man went home with gratitude. He understood what he owed and he understood to whom he owed it.

"The Pharisee only cared about the gift he had given to God.

That's why he made such a public display of it. Look everybody, look what I'm giving to God. Look at how good I am. That's the gift I give God.

Gratitude is the beginning of getting right with God.

The Pharisee owes nothing to anyone and so the Pharisee's idea of gratitude is thank me. Thank me for being a heck of a guy. Thank me for being a law abiding righteous individual who follows the teachings of the Master, who knows God like this.





However, the tax collector realized that he owes everything to God, thank God and thank you. He knows that his life is dependent the mercy, the grace, the bounty, the generosity poured out upon him by God. Not only to give him life but to sustain his life.

Gratitude is not an end in and of itself. It's not just a good feeling. It's not the way we are supposed to live and approach each day for our benefit. Gratitude is not an end. Gratitude is the beginning and it is the beginning of care-free living. When you are grateful for everything you don't worry about what's up ahead because you know that no matter what's up ahead God is also up ahead. So it's okay to have tough days. It's okay to anticipate enormous trials. It's okay to know that in your life there will be times when things will not go well, when you will be without, when you will experience suffering. But live care-free. Don't worry about that stuff and if you are in the middle of it, don't give up hope.

Jesus shares these words in the Sermon on the Mount. They are words that you have heard a thousand times. Maybe this time they will sink in.

Do not worry about your life. Don't fret over what you will eat, or drink. Don't obsess over your apparel or your appearance. Your life is more than subsistence. Your life is more about making sure that you've got enough. Your identity is more than a fashion statement. It's more than a pseudo that you put on yourself.

Look at the birds of the air. They don't give a second thought about their next meal and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. God loves you more than anything.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that God loves you more than anything? God even said it and we still have trouble believing it because we know how much we owe to God. We know the debt that we have incurred and we know anything that we do is just a tiny repayment. It's just a down payment on all that God asks of us.

Gratitude is the beginning of care-free living when we realize that nothing we can do can pay God back but everything we do can glorify God.

That's why gratitude is also the beginning of care-less loving. Care-less loving means loving someone else and now caring about whether or not they deserve it. Not caring whether or not they have earned it. Not caring whether or not they are going to take it and do something redemptive with or whether they are going to reject you out of hand. Care-less loving is loving no matter what and it's what Christ calls us to do.

A new command I give you: love one another. Love others not the way that you would love someone who is already in love with you. Love others the way I love you. Everyone will know who you are following if you love one another.

Everyone will know who we are following if we love one another. What a beautiful idea—that the way we love is to exemplary, so transparent, that people who know anything at all about Christ will actually be able to see his face morphing from ours as we extend his love—care-less love and care-free living.

And gratitude is also the beginning of something else very important: care-full giving. Giving of yourself in a way that cares for other people: cares for their needs, cares for their fears, cares for their anxieties, cares for their loneliness. Sometimes the greatest gift you can give someone is simply being there with them, to be full of care and to give of your time. I'm not talking about money. Money is the



least of the things that we should be concerned about giving one another because if our heart is there, if we are there in our care-less loving of God and loving of one another we won't hold anything back. The money just comes but time, the gifts that we have in the spirit, these are the things that we need to make sure that we are sharing in care-full giving.



Why we do this? Because it is what Christ is all about.

Give to the one who asks and don't walk away from someone who is in need. It's easy to walk away. It's our natural inclination to let someone in need care for themselves.



Think of all the people in Cody's life. Think of all the people who have practiced with him care-free living and care-less loving and care-full giving.



What does gratitude look like? It looks like that face. See the smile? Feel the warmth, the heart? Understand that when we dream of what it is to be a servant of Christ you dream big but you look in the little things because all right here are the gifts that you will open today. Look at what I've got and thanks be to God.



