

Grace and Gratitude

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If you would, turn in your Bibles to Psalm 136. If you don't have a Bible, there are some scattered throughout under the chairs or there's also the sermon text printed in your program on this insert.

When God's people began to come back to the land after exile, they eventually were able to rebuild the temple and after laying the foundation of the temple, Ezra and others led God's people in worship and they sang responsively, Ezra said, praising and giving thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel, and all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. We are about to read this responsively, I won't make us sing it responsively, but this little chorus "for his steadfast love endures forever," is an old one and a favorite of God's people. And as I read scripture in a moment, I would like you to respond. We'll read together that 26 time repeated phrase or saying "for his steadfast love endures forever."

So would you stand with me and read with me God's word. I will read the first line and together we'll respond with the chorus.

1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. 2 Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. 3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever; 4 to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever; 5 to him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever; 6 to him who spread out the earth above the waters, for his steadfast love endures forever; 7 to him who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures forever; 8 the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast love endures forever; 9 the moon and stars to rule over the night, for his steadfast love endures forever; 10 to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, for his steadfast love endures forever; 11 and brought Israel out from among them, for his steadfast love endures forever; 12 with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for his steadfast love endures forever; 13 to him who divided the Red Sea in two, for his steadfast love endures forever; 14 and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for his steadfast love endures forever; 15 but overthrew Pharaoh and

his host in the Red Sea, for his steadfast love endures forever; 16 to him who led his people through the wilderness, for his steadfast love endures forever; 17 to him who struck down great kings, for his steadfast love endures forever; 18 and killed mighty kings, for his steadfast love endures forever; 19 Sihon, king of the Amorites, for his steadfast love endures forever; 20 and Og, king of Bashan, for his steadfast love endures forever; 21 and gave their land as a heritage, for his steadfast love endures forever; 22 a heritage to Israel his servant, for his steadfast love endures forever. 23 It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever; 24 and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures forever; 25 he who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever. 26 Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Father, help us, help us by the power of your Spirit to not get bored with the repetitious chorus of this Psalm. Help us, Father, to know it, to hear it, to let it get inside us, convince us that this is true because we need, we need this chorus, we need these words and we need you. So we come this morning and ask that you would do a great work in us by the power of your Spirit through your word. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please be seated.

I've been thinking this week, I wonder what it would be like if we were to invite Job to Thanksgiving dinner. What would it be like to invite Job, you know, the guy from the Bible, Job to Thanksgiving dinner this Thursday. Just a reminder, the book of Job is the account of one of the richest men of the Ancient Near East who also happened to be the most righteous man alive at the time. God said this to Satan about Job, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil?" Now as you know the story, Satan argued that Job only believed in God because he was blessed by God, and that if Job lost his desirably rich life, he would lose his desire for righteous living. He accused Job of loving God's good gifts and not God the good giver. Hm, it's quite a challenge and so God allowed Satan to take everything from Job: his wealth, his business, Job's enemies stole his property and brutally murdered his employees. Everything was lost. Satan took the life of every one of Job's children when a tragic natural disaster caused the eldest son's house to fall on them while they were gathering together for dinner. And as if that wasn't enough, God allowed Satan to take Job's health from him, but not his life, and he was afflicted with a painful disease which covered him with sores from head to foot. And after all of this loss, as you remember, the only family member God allowed to live was his wife and she was no help to Job at all. "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die," she said. So Job lost everything and the only thing he was allowed to keep was his miserable life and his miserable wife.

So imagine what would it be like to have this man join your family for Thanksgiving dinner this week. Well, first, think about what Job would do if he came to your house for Thanksgiving dinner before he lost everything. Just imagine that for a minute. I would

expect him to be the life of the party, wouldn't you? I mean, jumping at the chance to carve the turkey and say the Thanksgiving prayer. You'd get tired of him counting all his many blessings one by one, and one of us, not even Satan, would blame Job for being so thankful, after all, look how much God had blessed him. And biblically speaking, let's just get this right here, that response is right and good because gratitude is the response to grace.

The Greek word that's in our Bibles that's translated "grace" is the word "charis." It means "gift." Grace is God giving you the gift of his favor and love when you don't deserve it. As one author said, grace is the face that love wears when it meets the undeserving. But interestingly enough, the Greek word that's translated "thanksgiving" or "give thanks" comes from that word "charis." The word "eucharisteo" means "give thanks." So gratitude is the response we have to being given a gift. God's grace and our gratitude are inseparably linked.

So gratitude is a response to God's gracious gifts. True. But what do you do when all of God's blessings have been taken away, when it seems that God has withheld his grace? What would Job do if you invited him to Thanksgiving dinner after he lost everything but his miserable life and his miserable wife? Would he even bring her? Would Job change that old song to, "Count my many blessings? I can't think of one." What would Thanksgiving even mean to a guy like Job? What's Job got to be thankful for? Would you blame Job for not fully engaging in the Thanksgiving festivities? If I were him, I'd be sitting in the corner and I would not be wearing my "Too blessed to be stressed" t-shirt. But this is how Job responded after he lost all of his wealth, his health, his children. Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped and he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this, the author says, Job did not sin or charge God with any wrong. Then after Job did lose his health and his wife told him to curse God and die, Job responded this way. He said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak." He was even gracious in that. He didn't call her a foolish woman, he said, "You're speaking like one. Shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil?" In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

Now I know what you're thinking. That was chapters 1 and 2 of a very very long book. He started off well, yes, but he spent the whole rest of the book griping and grumbling to God and not grateful. I'll admit the man struggled to hang onto his confession of gratitude but just wait, we'll come back to that, and besides, we need to get to Psalm 136, right? So here's what I think the Lord wanted me to see in Psalm 136 this morning and I have to trust that's what he wants you to see as well, that, yes, gratitude is the right response to all of God's good and gracious gifts to us, gratitude is the right response to a roof over our heads, food on our tables, a place to lay our heads, a loving church community, financial security, jobs, health, our children, and a rich relationship with our spouse. Thanksgiving, as we typically envision it, is about giving thanks for all those tangible touchable gifts, right? And that's right and good. Paul said we should be giving thanks to God always and for everything. He reminded Timothy that all food, in fact, everything was created by God to be received with thanksgiving. So, yes, give thanks to God for all these good and

gracious gifts this week and every week, but when you've lost any or all of these blessings, when you don't have a roof over your head, or it leaks, when you don't have food on your table, or it's not the kind you really like to have, "We don't have anything to eat." The pantry's full. "Eh, that's not what I want." That's me talking to my wife. When you don't have a place to lay your head or you can't afford to replace that mattress that makes your back hurt, when you don't belong to a loving church community or you've lost one you had, when you've lost your job and your financial security, or you've never experienced this mysterious thing they call financial security, when you've lost your health or never had good health to begin with, when you've lost your spouse or aren't satisfied with the one you have, when you'd love to count your many blessings but don't think you have any blessings to count, when it seems all evidence of God's grace in your life is gone, Psalm 136 comes along and says there is a deeper grace still, a deeper grace for which we can still be grateful even when we've lost everything else, and since there exists a grace that is deeper than the graces of good food, friends, family, finances, and physical health, God wants to equip you this morning by his Spirit with Psalm 136 for a gratitude that is deeper than the gratitude you have for all the many blessings God has given you. I'm trying to prepare us because there just may be a day when you are the Job that gets invited to Thanksgiving dinner and you and I need to be ready for that day, and for some of you, this Thanksgiving already feels that way.

So let's get on with it. What is this deeper grace, this gift of God for which we can be grateful even when we've lost everything else? Well, the psalmist says it and you just said it 26 times because God wants it drilled into our hearts and our heads. It's the gift of the steadfast love of the Lord that endures forever. In Psalm 136 and other Old Testament passages, that phrase "steadfast love," so when you're reading it and you see "steadfast love," it's the translation of a Hebrew word "chesed." It refers to God's covenant love, to the love of God for his people that compels him to remain faithful to the covenant he made with them. That's steadfast love.

Let me remind you of the covenant he made with them. Listen to what the Lord said to his people in Deuteronomy 7:6-9. I want you to listen for steadfast love, faithfulness, covenant. I want you to listen for these things. God said, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession," oh my, "out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." Well, they must be special people, right? "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you," he set his love on you and chose you, "for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and [he also] repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today. And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love

that he swore to your fathers. He will love you, bless you, and multiply you." That's his steadfast love. It's the love that compels him to keep the promise he made to Abram and all of his children.

But did you notice something? He said because you listened to these rules and keep and do them the Lord God will keep with you the covenant and steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. Well, we have a problem. Did they listen to, keep and do God's rules? No. Did God still keep the covenant in steadfast love with them that he promised to their fathers? Yes. Let me tell you about this steadfast love. Here's how much God loves his people. He knew that his people would not keep the stipulations of the covenant he made with them. He knew they would not listen to or do what he commanded. He knew that they would instead be those who hate him and turn their backs on him to turn and worship the very good gifts he'd given them. So he wrapped himself in flesh and blood and took the form of man in Jesus. In Christ, Yahweh obeyed every command his people had promised but refused to obey. In Christ, Yahweh received the curse that God promised those who hated him. Christ fulfilled every obligation of the covenant for his people and Christ was destroyed in the place of his people for their covenant failure. That's how much he loves his people. He'll tell them to do something and then do it for them and pay the price for their failure to do it.

In Luke 6, Jesus described his Father's love for the likes of us. This is what Jesus said, "he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Your Father is merciful." This is the God to whom we give thanks. Friends, no one's loved you like that. No one has ever loved me like that. My incredibly patient and kind and self-giving wife's love is as close as I've ever experienced to the steadfast love of Jesus, and yet her love pales in comparison to his. There is no love in the universe that even comes close to God's steadfast love for ungrateful stubborn losers like me. This is the gospel, folks. Christ came into the world to save sinners, Paul said, among whom I am the poster child. This is why the gospel is called good news.

Last weekend, I had the privilege of speaking to the youth of our presbytery and I was talking about the gospel, the gospel means good news, and I suggested to them that they are being preached good news all the time and I wasn't talking about what comes from the pulpits of their churches, I was talking about what they see on tv, hear on the radio, see on the little irritating advertisements on YouTube, all the things on Facebook that somehow know what you like and tempt you with offers. The world is constantly preaching good news to us, the problem is that their bad news which their good news seems to solve is the wrong bad news. Every commercial is a gospel message. The bad news is your hair looks horrible, the good news is our product will save you from that hell. Right? Every commercial is a preaching of a gospel. They'll convince you why your life is hellish and they'll convince you why they have the answer to save you from that awful awful condition.

So we talked about that last weekend and we talked about why is it that those of us who have grown up in the church or been around the church for a long time, why is it that we get bored with the good news of the gospel? Why do we get bored with that? Why do I

need it every day? Well, there are things that we do every day that we don't tend to get bored with. I don't get bored with eating apparently. I take a shower every day. You can say, "Thank you." I mean, we entertain ourselves every day with something. Why do we not get bored with those things? I've been there, done that. I've eaten, you know, a lot of different stuff. I've taken showers before. They're always the same. And I've entertained myself in all kinds of great ways. Why would I keep doing that? That's just dumb. It's so repetitive. And our conclusion was that the reason we keep doing those things is because we think or know that we need them, and the reason that we get bored with the gospel is because we don't think we need it. It's not good news if I don't think there's bad news, but the Bible says the bad news is worse than a bad hair day, it's worse than not having friends, it's worse than not having your health, it's worse than not having your spouse, it's worse than not having your wealth, it's worse than not having anywhere to lay your head, it's worse than all the things, all the bad news that Job received. The bad news is not having Jesus.

Psalm 112 says that people who belong to God are not afraid of bad news. Their hearts are firm, trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are steady. They will not be afraid until they look in triumph on their adversaries. How does that work? How is that possible? Why do we not have to be afraid of the kind of bad news that Job received? Because, as I said, there's a loss greater than the loss that Job experienced. The worst news you and I could ever receive are the words that Jesus said some will actually hear on the last day when he says to their faces, "Depart from me. I never knew you. Depart from you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." There is no bad news, friends, compared to hearing that you'll be forever separated from the loving presence of your Creator and instead spend eternity under his judgment, but the good news of the gospel is that Christ came into the world to save sinners from that curse by becoming a curse for us. Listen, you don't have to hear those words from Jesus on that day if today you would believe that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, including you, and then based on that truth, turn from your sinful self-rule, submit your heart and life to the rule of Jesus, and learn for the rest of your life what it means to orient everything in your solar system around the Son of God because he loves you and that's good news, and the degree to which I remember and rest in the grace of God's love for me is the degree to which I will return gratitude.

Now that's it. That's the deeper grace, is the steadfast love of the Lord for his people. It's the gospel. In Psalm 136 in a very colorful way, it preaches that gospel, that good news to us. It assures us of two truths that gives us hope when he says his steadfast love endures forever. There are two truths in here that remind us and convince us that when he says that, he means it. Psalm 136 would teach us that those two truths are, according to verses 1 through 3 and verse 26, that we must stay grounded in the grace of who God is, and secondly in verses 4 to 25, we must stay grounded in the grace of what God has done, is doing, and will do. This is going to go faster than you think, so hang on.

First of all, we can be convinced of the grace of God's steadfast love because of who God is. Verse 1 through 3, "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good," that's verse 1, excuse me. Think about this, he loves us because he's the only one good enough to love sinners.

He's the only God who wants to love us. Do you know what all the other gods want from you? They want you to serve them and give your life for them. Yahweh, the only true and living God, he's the only one who serves and gives his life for his people. No other god will do that. All other gods demand that we do for them to get them to "love us." Slavish fear is their motivation. Yahweh is the only one who did for us, so our doing is not to get God to love us but it's because he loves us.

The Psalm goes on to say, "Give thanks to the God of Gods, to the Lord of lords," verse 26, "to the God of heaven." God loves because he's the only one who is great enough to love us. He's the only one who can do it. Those descriptions of God, God of gods, Lord of lords, God of heaven, they come from Deuteronomy 10. Listen to these words, "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God." No other god has the ability to overcome the sin that makes us unlovable. It takes a great and sovereign God to set his love on a guilty and selfish people. You can be assured that he loves you because of who he is. Thanks be to God.

Secondly, you can be assured of his love because of what he has done, is doing, and will do. The rest of the Psalm goes on to tell in short form the story of the Bible. The first verses 4 through 9 are all about the creation, and so the message is that out of love God created a world in which he and his people could share life together. Each act of creation that's listed here is followed by "because his steadfast love endures forever." He made everything because he loves us. He wants to live in fellowship with us.

Then verses 10 through 14 relay the account of God's rescue from slavery in Egypt, from the Passover all the way through going through the Red Sea. Out of love, God remembered and rescued his sinful people so they could share life together in a place he was preparing for them. He struck down the firstborn of Egypt. He redeemed them by the blood of a lamb and he brought them out and rescued them from his and their enemies.

Then as the story continues, he led his people through the wilderness, verse 16. He refreshed them with help and hope on their journey to the place he had prepared for them, the Promised Land. And along the way, he brought them safely there by destroying enemies along the way. And so you get a taste of what we've been learning in Judges of how God cleaned out the land and gave it to his people as a gift of grace. He brought them safely to the place he had prepared and promised.

Why is it important to rehearse that story? All of you know it and you hear it all the time and you may say, "Here we go again. Here's the story. I know, creation, redemption." It's important because of the way we are.

I recently head an interview with the man who is apparently the media and technology consultant guru go-to guy for CNN. He's written a book called "Present Shock." It's in response to another book written at the end of the last century called "Future Shock," in

which that man said that things were changing so rapidly in our world that we were all in shock as we looked to the future. The millennium was coming, the turn of the millennium was coming. Everybody's preparing, looking for the future, what's it going to be like, and things were changing so much that we couldn't keep up with it and we were in shock because the future was coming right now. But since the turn of the century and the Y2K bug was smashed on the windshield of the new millennium and since the fall of the two towers in Manhattan, we're not looking to the future anymore. He says we are all about now. We're all about now. Everything's focused on now. He said even our technology shows that there's a need for constant stimulation and distraction. We've lost the narrative of a story with a beginning and a middle and a purposeful end, and we're just right here, just wanting to feel something.

And as believers, it really reminds me of the attitude that I have so often, and that is the danger of the attitude that says, "Well, what have you done for me lately, God? I mean, yeah, I know the story about what you did at the Red Sea and blah, blah, blah." But like the people of Israel who just moments out of the Red Sea when Moses spent 40 days on the mountain getting some instructions from the God who rescued them, got tired of waiting and said, "What has he done for us lately? Aaron, here, here's some gold. Make us a god so that we can worship." We're the same way. We have in this book all that we need to know about what God has done but me, I say, "Well, what have you done for me lately because I'm not really feeling it right now, God." I need him to constantly ping me like a notification on my phone with something that makes me feel good and feel like he's there and feel like he cares. If I'm not presently experiencing what I consider good things from God, blessings from God, then I grumble and gripe and I don't have gratitude.

The next verses remind us that there is a now power to the gospel that is only dependent on what's been done and what's going to be done. The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever so that must mean the love that was then and the love that will be is also right now. The Psalm writer turns to right now when he says he remembered us, he rescued us, and he gives, present tense, right now, food to all flesh. He remembered us in our low estate. He rescued us from our foes. What happened then makes a difference now and that same God continues to be at work even now providentially sustaining his world until that time when he concludes the story with the final scene that will consummate his plan to share neverending life with his people in a new heaven and a new earth. Out of his gracious and sovereign love through Jesus the promised Messiah, God remembered and rescued us, the guilty selfish people so that we could share life together with him in a place he prepared for us. All because he loves us. He loves us. He loves us. I should shout it 26 times.

As we move toward a conclusion here, I want to share with you another form of this same kind of gospel and I want you to listen. If you have to close your eyes to keep from being distracted, do it. This is from Romans 8. I want you to feel as you hear these words the now power of the gospel, why does it matter now. Take this like a bazillion notifications hitting your phone at the same time. I pray the Spirit will do that to you. Romans 8, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be

conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." That's the gospel.

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" You see, this truth, that he gave us Jesus, this is the deepest grace. That makes it okay if you don't experience any other grace because, really, all I need is Jesus and whatever he chooses to give me.

"Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" Do you feel condemned? "It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." If you're Job at Thanksgiving dinner, listen to this, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." That's the deeper grace. "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation," including your wife who tells me to curse God and die, not mine, Job's, none of these things "will be able to separate me from," what? "The love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Job lost everything, right? No. He did not lose his God. Though Job struggled to believe that and he could not make sense of what God was doing and why he was doing it, he did know who God was and he did know that he was completely dependent on that God for life now and life forever. He said in Job 19, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!"

In the end, after God appeared to Job in a terrifying storm and reminded Job who the creator and sustainer of the universe is, hint, "Not you, Job, me, God." Job said, "I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear but now my eyes see you therefore I repent in dust and ashes." God did what he did in Job's life because he loved Job. How do I know this? Because God worked all those horrible things in Job's life for good, for the greatest good that Job would see God more clearly, know him more deeply, and trust him more fully. That's what Job needed.

I want to close by telling you about the greatest sermon I've ever heard and I've listened to it 100 times. The Reverend E. V. Hill, he's with Jesus now but he was a large African-American man, preached in L.A., and years ago, I heard a recording that "Focus on the Family" aired of the sermon he preached for his wife's funeral. The sermon was entitled "The Lord Giveth," based on Job 1:21 in the King James version, "The Lord giveth and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Reverend Hill spent 20 or so minutes describing how the Lord gave in his wife, whom he called Baby, so many good gifts he gave through her, good gifts to her parents, to him, to his children, to her friends, to the churches she served, to the community, and etc. Then Dr. Hill said this and I can't

do it justice, I'm going to try to imitate him but you have to find it online, maybe I'll post it. He said, "And I could go on and on, so for as a wife is concerned, I was one of the richest men of earth. It is because of this that the controversy arises. It is because of having been given so much in Baby that the rest of the text seems out of order," the part that says the Lord takes away. He said, "We get so used to 'and the Lord gave,' we get so used to morning by morning new mercies we see, so used to having all that our hearts desire until all we can get to is 'the Lord gave.' There are those who can say everything I've asked the Lord has given it to me, and if that's true in your experience, keep on living because I'm a witness that there's some more to this verse for it says the Lord, same God, same God, taketh away. We get so used to 'and the Lord giveth' we take it for granted and so when the Lord taketh away, we pitch a temper tantrum. And the sign of Christian maturity, is that when the Lord giveth? Blessed, blessed, when he reigns down blessings, blessed, but when he takes away, Christian maturity, when he breaks your heart, Christian maturity, when he doesn't give you what you ask for, Christian maturity, blessed, blessed, blessed."

Friends, if the Apostle Paul said he had to learn in every situation what it means to be content, if the Apostle Paul said, "I know what it's like to be completely without and I know what it's like to have more than I need, but the secret of being content in both situations is I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." How did Paul keep that focus? It's because he kept the good news of God's steadfast love ever in front of him. As he said in Galatians 2, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh," whether in abundance or complete abject poverty, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Thanks be to God.