

Giving Thanks at a Time like this

As Johnell Norton would say, Good morning church!

When I was teaching someone would ask, “will this be on the test?”

When I was starting a committee meeting, someone would ask “will this be long?”

Let me put your minds at ease: this won't be on the test, and it won't be long!

First, a word about the slides: I chose the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth” because I spent the summer on an island in the lakes region of New Hampshire, and I am thankful for the natural beauty that we are surrounded by each day and I'm happy to share that with you. Most of the scenes are of clear skies, sunsets, and moonrises. Becky tells me we also have sunrises, but I'll have to take her word for it.

2020 has been a different kind of year. We mourn the losses and the suffering; we feel for those who have lost their jobs or their businesses; we acknowledge the toll this has taken on so many. Through all of this, can we find reasons to be thankful?

For me, the short answer is yes. Thankful for all the first responders and medical people; for frontline workers who showed heart and commitment; for businesspeople who showed resilience and creativity; for friends and family who used technology to stay connected and offer encouragement; and for the people of Asbury.

I requested the reading from the Old Testament prophet Micah this morning. Micah lived in the 8th century BC, which makes him older than me, and he was a contemporary of Isaiah who got a lot more ink than Micah! When I was sworn in as Director of the Rhode Island Department of Labor & Training by Governor Almond, I quoted this verse: He has shown you oh people what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. In my five decades plus here at Asbury I have felt people living that message, and I am honored to be among you.

I am thankful for those who came before us, who sacrificed their time, used their talents, and saved their pennies and nickels to build Asbury which took years to complete. Those folks raised their families here and Asbury provided a warm, caring, loving, nurturing place. They also reached out to the underserved through ministries and missions appropriate to their time. And let's not forget the ministers who led and encouraged the people to do good works locally and in the world.

I am thankful for your kindness. Preparing and delivering bag lunches and bottles of water to the bus riders in Providence; bringing clothing and household items to Project Outreach at the Open Table of Christ United Methodist Church to help the poorest among us; raising and

sending money to help feed the people of a poor village in Guatemala that a Missionary friend of Yohan and Juhee was assisting; making phone calls to the members of the church to make sure people were OK, and parishioners doing the grocery shopping for some of our more vulnerable parishioners; going out of your way to accommodate the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts here at the church, which has sponsored them for 88 years. And somehow, in the middle of all of this, you even managed to pull off a surprise drive-by birthday parade for an old kid!

I am thankful to Cindy Ford, to Donna Rowe, and to Nadia McGovern for their willingness to share their thoughts about Asbury with you.

I am thankful for the impact you have made on peoples lives. I think of Walt Day whose growing up years were shaped by the Bishop family, and who became a professional with Athletes in Action – and Team Chaplain for the Boston Red Sox and New England Patriots as well as shaping the character of the New England Revolution Soccer team; John Michael Spelman, who grew up in this church and is now Executive Director of the Aldersgate Camp and Retreat Center in North Smithfield – one of four United Methodist camps in New England. I think of Peter Lang who grew up here, now with his own accounting firm and a member of the Finance Committee at Camp Aldersgate. I think of John Alexander who grew up here and who now does our landscaping. And I think of their parents and mentors and am thankful to call them friends – the Bishop family, the Lang and Bush family, the Alexanders, Dick and Joan White and all of you. I am thankful for Asbury's impact on all who call Asbury home, from the youngest children to the most seasoned among us, for we all make up this church family

Beyond that, I thank the people who made it possible for us to be worshipping again here in this place. Diane Goins and the reopening team; David, Kerri, and Samantha Dorsey for helping us be safe here; Warren Cole for his trumpet music and for leading the Trustees to attend to our physical needs; Tim and Cami Webb for bringing us live into your homes; the musicians from Zion Korean UMC - with special thanks to Hanna Noh and Carlos Capacho - and Haven UMC, as well as our own Nancy Kennedy; Juhee for her magnificent Violin music; Alice and Ned for their beautiful gift of music this morning; and Yohan for his technical expertise and continuing encouragement.

Finally, I am thankful to be part of a church that believes in the power of prayer, raising concerns, giving thanks, and praising the Lord for his many blessings.

The day before Joan White's birthday earlier this month, my wife Becky had a birthday. Deb and Frank Rose sent her a beautiful card with words from Genesis: "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good." On the front of the card was an expression from the author Max Lucado: "God has placed his hand on your shoulder and said, 'you're something special.'" People of Asbury let me humbly observe: you're something special.

Will you bow your head with me?

Let us recall the words of Paul to the church of Galatia in central Turkey: (Galatians 5:22)

Loving God, teach us to live by the fruits of your holy spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (slide)

Amen