

“A Glimpse of Heaven (1): Joy and Gratitude”

Psalms 126, Mark 4:26-28

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November is my favorite month not because my son Jacob's birthday is on the 26th. Actually, he keeps reminding me of his birthday and asks me for birthday presents: chocolate cake and a Primus Transformer toy. Now it is harvest season bringing good memories of my family, joy and gratitude. I love pumpkin things like pumpkin pie and even Starbucks spice pumpkin frappuccino as a symbol of harvest. Truly, November is the month of joy and gratitude. I hope that your hearts will be filled with joyful and grateful things in this month. We have already received an extra hour of blessing from the end of daylight saving time today, haven't we?

This morning, I invite us to learn about God's Kingdom. We can only imagine what heaven looks like, but it is too hard to understand in our mind. In the Bible, God's kingdom is not a geographical concept, but it is a matter of God's realm and presence. In other words, wherever we rejoice in God, we can experience God's Kingdom within us.

Let us revisit our Scripture readings to know more about the secrets of Heaven. Our first Old Testament reading describes who our God is and what our God desires for us. The Scripture says, "God has done great things for us and we rejoiced. May those who sow in tears, reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves." Sowing in tears represents the reality of our life, our daily burdens, pains, struggles, and hard labor with unexpected challenges. Sometimes we weep, cry out and are in despair in this life journey.

Speaking of sowing, farming is not an easy job. I have an experience to share with you. Early spring, I bought many seeds: eggplants, different kinds of tomato, bell pepper, cucumber and others at Home Depot. I planted them in my small home garden, but most of them didn't sprout. It turned out a failure! In other words, I wasted my money! I was so disappointed! But imagine that you are a professional farmer. You would worry about many things until you enjoy your harvest. For example, enough rain, good soils and good crops. When we turn to God, God will provide good things for us and we will rejoice in Him. The author of The Message, Eugene Peterson paraphrases our Old Testament reading this way "God brings rains to our drought-stricken lives, so those who planted their crops in despair will shout hurrahs at the harvest, so those who

went off with heavy hearts will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.” God can turn our sorrow into joy, tears into laughter, and crying into shouting hurrahs! Where this transformation happens is in God’s Kingdom and Heaven. Truly, without joy, there is no heaven yet in your heart.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus directly taught his disciples about the Kingdom of God. Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.” The point in this reading is how God works in our lives. The Bible says that in the kingdom of God, “a little tiny seed” can be the source of a great harvest. We may not notice it but God watches and nurtures it!

What does “a small, little and tiny seed” mean in our life? Sometimes, we feel that nobody knows us, our pain, suffering and struggles, but God knows us and cries with us and brings comfort to us. Today’s readings challenge us to rethink how God is involved in our lives. People often overlook it, but God cares for the weak and vulnerable. God is even working in our little seeds! Little seeds might seem small and tiny that they are so easily forgotten by people, but it matters to God. The little seeds grow day by day, year by year, as Jesus says, it will become great and grow into a harvest in the end! Whoever you are, you are important and precious to God. God will not give you up!

How about your life? If you imagine your life is not great, but instead small, and powerless, do not get discouraged. Our God will give power to the powerless. God will lift you up and give you hope with God’s special heart and eyes. As a tiny little seed grows into fullness, God will lead you and guide you in your path of life.

Last week, I visited one of our church members in a nursing home. She has been a lifelong and active member of our church since in the early 1950s. She still reads our newsletter every month and asks me about our church all the time even though she is not able to come to church any more. She loves our church and dearly misses our Sunday worship! I realized that it is a great blessing for us to come to church every Sunday! Recently, she has been very ill and the family in prayer decided to put her in hospice and palliative care for the best care for her life.

Her son asked me to offer communion while he was staying with his mother. It was a great honor and blessing for me to hear her life journey and

faith right after communion. For a moment of silence, she gently started sharing her grateful heart with me. She said, “I am very grateful for my life. I have been surrounded by many good people, my family, my son here with me and my church. I have received many blessings in my life. I thank God for these blessings given to me.” Her sharing deeply touched my heart and humbled me as well!

I believe that our spiritual life is meant to lead us to a life of gratitude and joy. This must be a glimpse of God’s Kingdom. Augustine says when we do not pray, “Our hearts are trammelled in the direction of ungrateful possessiveness.” Our life journey is a rehearsal before an encounter with God and experience of a real Heaven someday. In this season of joy and gratitude, I pray that we can find many reasons why we are so blessed and thankful to God and experience a foretaste of God’s kingdom within us. Amen.