



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

NOVEMBER 18, 2012  
THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Discover the Joy of Wise Living  
Genesis 41:1-8, 25-36; I Peter 4:8-11

Author Rudyard Kipling earned both fame and fortune from his popular writings. It is said that a reporter once said to Mr. Kipling, "I just read that somebody calculated that the money you make from your writings amounts to over one hundred dollars per word." The reporter then reached into his pocket, pulled out a one hundred dollar bill, handed it to Kipling, and said, "Here's a one hundred dollar bill, Mr. Kipling. Now give me one of your hundred dollar words." The author looked at the money, slipped it into his pocket, and said, "Thanks!"

"Thanks" is indeed a valuable word and an important attitude to have. This week we continue a tradition that we trace back nearly 400 years in this country but which is actually as old as humanity itself. Gratitude for what we have is as natural as breathing and as important as the air that we breathe.

The psalmists repeatedly called on people to give thanks to God. The Hebrew priests regularly invited the people to offer gifts of gratitude to God. Thanksgiving is the linchpin in our religious experience. God is generous. We are grateful.

Despite the Apostle Paul's admonition, "In all things give thanks" (I Thessalonians 5:18), we know that it is sometimes difficult to express gratitude. Things go wrong for us. Life does not turn our way. Times become hard. Sometimes in our frustration with life, we lose sight of the blessings we still enjoy.

Joseph is a good example of someone who had things great for a while, but whose life suddenly turned upside down for a while and looked pretty bleak. There is no question that Joseph's youth was blessed. He was the oldest son of his father's favored wife Rachel and the next youngest of twelve sons. Joseph and his little brother Benjamin were treated by their father with great favor. While the older brothers were out working in the fields, digging cisterns, herding sheep, and keeping wild animals at bay, Joseph was strolling around the farm in his special coat. We know it as the coat of many colors and it may well have been multi-colored. What likely set it apart,

however, was the fact that it had long sleeves. Such a robe was not really suited for physical work on a farm. It was the attire of an aristocrat, someone who would not generally get their hands dirty with menial labor. Jacob did Joseph no favors when he gave him that coat, but Joseph certainly exploited it. And the fact that he energetically told his brothers of his dreams in which they bowed down to him did not help at all. Being a little brother myself, I know how exasperating one can be. I imagine my brothers would have tossed me into a cistern if one had been handy.

That is exactly what Joseph's brothers did! They threw him into a dry pit, smeared his coat with blood so their father would think he had been killed, and sold him to the first caravan that came along. Interesting enough, the folks who bought him were Ishmaelites—cousins of the Hebrews through their ancestor who was the half-brother of these boys' grandfather Isaac.

You know the rest of the story. Joseph was taken to Egypt where he was sold to Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard, who made him overseer of his household. Things began to improve for Joseph until Potiphar's wife took a liking to him and he rebuked her advances. When she told her husband that Joseph had made advances to her, he was thrown into prison. Just as things looked their darkest, Joseph again he found favor with the chief jailer who put him in charge of all the prisoners.

Two of Pharaoh's personal servants, his cupbearer and his baker, made their master mad and he put them in prison. Joseph befriended them and when they had odd dreams, he interpreted them. He asked the cupbearer, who would be restored to his previous position, to remember him to Pharaoh and help get him out of prison. Yet, for over a year, the cupbearer forgot Joseph until Pharaoh had a serious of dreams which troubled him. He was told about Joseph who was summoned and told the Pharaoh that his dreams meant that Egypt would have seven years of bountiful harvests followed by seven years of famine. So impressed was the Pharaoh that he placed Joseph in charge of everything in Egypt. He guided the people to be frugal and store as much food as possible for seven years. When the famine came, he rationed the food so that everyone had plenty to eat and Egypt was not ruined. He saved the Egyptian people and he saved his own family when they came asking to buy food.

Through all of the ups and downs of his life, the injustices and his own follies, Joseph never lost his sense of gratitude. He befriended other people. He helped out in whatever way he could. And he never again lorded his

authority over anyone else, including his brothers. He was a good steward of the gifts of insight, wisdom, and compassion God had given him. He was also a good steward of the Egyptian commodities. Joseph played a critical role in the story of the Hebrew people and it all began with a sense of thanksgiving for what God had done for him throughout his life.

Stewardship is grounded in gratitude, but it is lived out through involvement. No matter who we are or what we do, we see our role as critical to the success of the whole. Stewardship is claiming our part in making something happen.

The famed architect Christopher Wren designed some of the most beautiful cathedrals in Britain. While he was overseeing the construction of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, he would tour the construction site and talk with the various craftsmen, most of whom did not know him. One day he came upon a group of stonecutters hard at work. He asked the first one, "What are you doing?" The man replied, "Anyone can see I'm cutting stone." He put the same question to another worker who answered, "I'm earning five shilling two-pence a day." Walking a bit further, he asked a third man what he was doing. The man looked at him with a face full of joy and replied, "Why, I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build a great cathedral to the glory of God."

While he was but one of thousands of craftsmen who worked for thirty-five years on the construction of St. Paul's, this man understood that what he was doing was much more than using a skill or earning a paycheck. He was a good steward of his skill but he was also a vital part of a much larger undertaking. The stones he cut remain secure and in place to this day more than three hundred years later.

Thankful and involved people are good stewards. They are grateful for all God has given them and mindful of their part in what God is doing through them. Like the stonecutter and Joseph, they understand that God needs them as a vital part of his work in the world.

Lakeside is a vital part of God's work in the world. There is a reason God moved within the men and women who established this congregation fifty-seven years ago. There is a reason God has shaped us into the people we are and has called us to the ministries we have claimed as our own. God has gifted us and is using us in amazing ways to share his love.

Bethlehem Tekle is a ten year old girl who lives in Ethiopia. We became a part of her life five years ago when we began supporting her. With an annual gift of \$500, we enable Bethlehem to attend school and have all of the supplies she needs to study. If we did not help her, she would likely be consigned to a life of poverty and ignorance which is the lot of most of the children of Ethiopia. Our stewardship for Bethlehem will make a tremendous difference in her life, in the future of her community, and perhaps of her country.

A couple of years ago I met a woman who is about my age and similar to me in many ways. She could easily be sitting here this morning. When I met her she had lost her job and with it her medical benefits. She returned to school at Wesleyan to become a teacher but had to turn to the Tar River Mission Clinic for her primary health care because she is a diabetic. Our stewardship helped to make it possible for her to maintain her health and chart a new career which will benefit the children in our community. Along with this lady, hundreds of people receive high quality healthcare. They no longer tie up critical resources in our local Emergency Room. They live better, work harder, and are thankful for a new lease on life. Our stewardship gives us a role in making the Tar River Mission Clinic possible and helping our neighbors remain healthy.

Through the wise use of our resources, Lakeside is a friend of teachers and provides meeting space for a local teachers sorority to gather. Through their efforts, we help provide continuing education, support for new teachers, and improvement in the classrooms of our schools. We make it possible for our young people to explore the wonders of music and to make music together to the glory of God. By providing space for CareNet Counseling, we offer support for couples who are struggling with the tensions of marriage and for women and men who have lost hope because they have lost work and income. By offering creative and innovative programs for our children year round, we introduce them to the love of God and their role in the ministry of Christ on earth.

When you look at our budget you see Lakeside members wisely committing themselves to vital ministries which make life better for us and for this community. You see yourself and the people around you responding to God's generosity by thankfully sharing what we have with others. You see faces of people who have experienced the love of God in the myriad ways we minister through our congregation.

Over the past few years we have all felt the economic pinch that has gripped not only our country but the entire world. Most of us have had to deal with limited funds due to the loss of jobs or benefits, the reduction of salaries, and the increase in the cost of living. In addition, many of us have been called upon to help family, friends, and community organizations get through these difficult economic times. Times such as these call for wise living. They demand prudence in all things. They insist that we re-evaluate our priorities. They require good stewardship of what we have.

Lakeside is a diverse congregation. That is what makes us strong. We have differing abilities and varying skills. None of us has the same talents, interests, or financial ability.

There is a tendency in some churches to think that if I do not financially support the ministry of the church someone else will. That is a wrong notion. What if the stonecutters working on St. Paul's Cathedral had not measured the stones or paid attention to the principles of construction. What if Joseph had ignored his gift of interpreting dreams and the wisdom God had given him in preparing for the impending famine? Egypt would have been decimated. That great culture might not have survived and with it Joseph's family might have perished. History would be different and our story might not have been written.

We are all important to the ministry of this congregation. The writer of the Epistle of I Peter reminds us: "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received" (4:10). One dollar in our offering plate is just as important as a thousand dollars. What we have to do is to exercise wise stewardship on our lives so that we have the resources to do what we are called to do here. It all begins with that valuable word "thanks" and continues with an awareness of our importance in the larger ministry of God through Lakeside Baptist Church. That, my friends, is reason to be joyful. Amen.

November 18, 2012

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We are but instruments through which you play your music of grace, O God. So take us into your loving hands and breathe your beautiful music through us to the world, we pray. Use us to awaken in others the melody of your love so that you might sing through them as well. Live through us all, O God, and make our hearts your own.

Give our hearts a melody that sings of compassion for all who are ill and hurting. Bring healing and wholeness to all who are besieged by sickness and disease of body, mind, or spirit. Use the gifts of healthcare professionals to make us whole again and apply the balm of your Holy Spirit to heal what human ingenuity alone cannot repair.

Fill our minds with peace as only you can offer, O God. There is so much turmoil in life, so many broken promises, and so much discord. Grant us your peace so that we might make peace with one another. Grant that in places like Israel and Gaza, Afghanistan and Iraq, Libya and Iran, and even in our own country peace will win out over hatred, jealousy, vengeance, and hopelessness. Bring us the peace of which Christ spoke, O God, and teach us to speak it as well.

Pray through us, O Lord, and make your desires become reality in our world. Where we see need, let us address it. Where there is despair, enable us to introduce hope. Wherever we discover sadness, guide us to offer encouragement. When we stumble upon grace, help us to celebrate the wonder of your love.

You have blessed us so richly, O God, and we are grateful. Help us to use every resource we have with care and concern. Open our hands and our hearts to one another and our community so that we might become the answers to the problems against which we struggle.

This week, hear our prayers of gratitude and our songs of thanksgiving. Know that we understand that nothing good comes to us apart from your generous hand and that nothing good is done in our world if our hands are not equally open and generous. Continue to bless us, we pray, that we might, in turn, bless one another, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Phrases in this prayer are borrowed from the anthem, "Prayer of Consecration" by Deborah Dresie.