

Thoughts of Gratitude

Bob Sittig – Jan 24, 2016

In today's scripture reading Jesus said "The Spirit of our God is upon me" and he proclaimed the year of our God's favor. We'll explore what that might mean shortly.

I'm here today because I will soon be changing my daily routine here at the church. I face this change in my life with feelings of excitement as well as a touch of sadness for those many folks with whom I won't be working on a daily basis. Notice I didn't say "I'm leaving", because I'm not really going anywhere. Susan and I intend to remain active members of this community after I retire as your administrator. That helps a bit with the sadness.

Another factor that makes it easier for me to depart is the knowledge that you will be in good experienced hands with Darren Hochstedler as your new administrator. I have known Darren for the past five years and can tell you that he has even more experience in that role than I have had. I feel very comfortable in turning over the administrative reins to him, and think you will too as you get to know him.

During our recent Stewardship campaign, Tim and Patricia reminded us of the satisfaction we derive from the act of giving for its own sake. This was described in the tale of the Widow's Mite as well as Tim relating the story of the Chicago Church giving their donation to a camp where they were not welcome. I believe that that same concept applies to service as well as treasure. While I expect that many of you may have experienced that feeling of satisfaction, I can tell you that for me, today, it goes beyond satisfaction to gratitude.

I give thanks for all of the treasures I have been blessed with during my time as administrator. I feel that I'm taking away far more than I have contributed. To list all of those blessings would take much longer than we have time for this morning, however I would like to highlight a few.

In the hallway in front of Fridell Lounge hang 8 posters which eloquently describe our Baptist Liberties, and I commend you to take the time to review them when you are able. Important to me are the concepts of Soul Liberty, Church Liberty, Scriptural Liberty and Priestly Liberty. These liberties are distinctive to Baptists. Each of these recognizes Jesus Christ and the Bible as the foundation for our beliefs, but puts the responsibility of scriptural interpretation in the hands of the individual.

Soul Liberty declares that each individual has his or her own relationship with God and no one comes between.

Priestly Liberty declares that we are all ministers of the church, empowered to share the good news of Jesus Christ. So I can truly say that the spirit of the Lord is upon me as I express my gratitude for my time with you.

Church liberty makes the local church the highest authority in the business of the church. There is no denominational higher authority in the Baptist system. The Evergreen region and American Baptist Churches USA exist to organize individual churches for missional purposes, but they don't set policy. That's why some Baptist churches may be welcoming and affirming and some are not, some have women as pastors and some don't. The violation comes when some churches try to tell others how they should conduct themselves. I am grateful to Roger Williams for creating a system where we still enjoy those freedoms some 377 years later.

In 2012 we celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the first worship service held in this Sanctuary building. I will be eternally grateful for the opportunity I had to be the custodian of this building for the past six years. The theme of Reverend Craig Darling's retirement sermon was "If These Walls Could Talk". I think about that every time I walk through this building. I think about the fact that this building would be at the corner of Madison and Harvard if the women of the church back in 1910 didn't think the noise from the Madison Street trolleys would interfere with the worship services.

I think about poor Dr. Whitman, who was our pastor during the planning and most of the construction of this building. Although he passed away suddenly ten months before this sanctuary was completed, he and his wife have been watching over us ever since from their perch in the Whitman Room.

My opportunity to shepherd the remodel of the Minor Hospital building helps to remind me of the enormity of that task of coordinating labor and materials in an era when the modern tools of today were not available. According to Pacific Builder Magazine, at that time, this was the first masonry structure west of Chicago that was constructed with the use of steel beams as the skeleton. It's likely that that feature is responsible for the fact that this building has withstood the effects of several earthquakes since 1912 with only relatively minor damage.

If you visit the Heritage Room off of Fellowship hall you will see photographs of all of the senior pastors since the formation of this church and many of the members of this congregation during those years as well. I think of and give thanks for all the saints that have gone before us in constructing and maintaining this building for over one hundred years. I think of the joys of

hundreds of couples who came down this isle to be wed. I think of the tears of those who have wept for loved ones memorialized in this room. The word awesome is so often misused these days, but it would not be misplaced to say that this is an awesome place, filled with awe. Not because of the bricks and plaster, which have their own story to tell, but for the faithful thousands who have sat in these pews and exited this sanctuary filled with inspiration and grace. And I had the privilege, with the help of many others, to maintain the health of this structure when it became my turn. I am truly grateful for that opportunity.

I am especially thankful for the staff of this church for all the qualities they have taught to me over these past six years:

I'm grateful for Pastors Craig Darling and Catherine Fransson who helped lead this congregation during some challenging times in our existence. Thank you Craig and Cathy for your unwavering dedication.

I'm grateful to Vicky Thomas for her unfailing devotion to the quality of the music we enjoy and sometimes take for granted in this church. We see the product in a few minutes of performance on Sunday that was the result of several weeks or even months in planning, development and rehearsal. Vicky has taught me that attention to detail in all things brings superior results.

Thank you Vicky.

I am grateful to David Kile for his embodiment of the word "Faithfulness." For all of the thirty years I have known David, he has consistently demonstrated his deep and genuine sense of caring for his flock. Not only to the senior members of our congregation, but to all who pass through the portals of our church. David faithfully follows up on those who are ill or incapacitated through his calls and visits. He brings the face of our church to those who can't be

here to experience it first hand and he often does this quietly and behind the scenes. I give thanks to David for teaching me what faithfulness looks like.

I have never been much of a musician. Despite clarinet lessons in fourth grade and an attempt at classical guitar lessons as an adult I have been a complete musical bust. I can't even pat my head and rub my stomach at the same time. That is why I am amazed every Sunday to watch Michelle playing organ or piano or any other instrument she picks up. I am still in disbelief of anyone who can play a different melody on each hand and each foot at the same time. Michelle adds variety and a spark to her musical offerings that adds that same energy to our worship service. Thank you Michelle for making a musical believer out of me.

Although you have been with us for less than a year, it is clear to me, Patricia, that you have become an important member of our pastoral team, and a beloved member of this community. I am thankful that you accepted the invitation to become part of our church family and to share with us some of the rich experience you brought with you from a lifetime at Mt Zion Baptist Church. You have indeed enriched our lives and I, and I believe this entire congregation, are thankful for your presence with us.

Susan and I have a son, Sebastian, who is roughly the same age as Ned. In fact Sebastian and his family are here with us today. When Ned came to us over five years ago, it was difficult for me not to feel some parental relationship to him as he became part of the Seattle First Baptist family. It is so gratifying to me to have watched Ned grow and mature in the pastoral role that he has undertaken. In this year of the Lord's favor, Ned will be earning his Doctor of Ministry Degree from Seattle University. I'm particularly gratified for the youth and energy that Ned brings to this faith community. I'm both proud and grateful to serve with you Ned.

For any of the things that I may have accomplished over my term as administrator, it is certain that I couldn't have done anything without the support of a faithful team of helpers. There have been many during that period, but I am particularly grateful to Judie Scott, our Office Manager for her faithfulness, reliability and hard work in keeping the wheels of this church turning. So much happens behind the scenes that makes the work of the church appear seamless and Judie plays an important part in that activity. My relationship with Judie has caused me to rethink what it means to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. My conclusion has been that sometimes you really can't do that. You can only listen and try to understand. Thank you Judie for helping to open my eyes.

It would be impossible for me to express to you the depths of my gratitude to Tim for all of the roles he plays in my life. He is my pastor, my confidant, my sounding board, but most important of all, he is my friend. Tim represents the finest example of service above self that I have ever witnessed in any human being. His caring and compassion for all of God's people sometimes comes at the expense of his own well-being. Whether or not I come to this place on a daily or weekly basis; as the administrator or congregant, I will always cherish the relationship we have had and will continue to have into the future. Thank you Tim for that privilege.

As previously mentioned, I could go on for quite some time expressing my appreciation for all who have helped keep this church community healthy and alive. I give thanks for Zane and Rick and Carol and Amy and Paul and Peach and Steve and Kellie and Samuel and Mila and Estilita and Rachel and Sarah, all who contribute to this community on a weekly basis. I suspect that some of you didn't realize what a team it takes to keep things going smoothly around here. I am thankful for all these faithful servants of the church.

Sometimes life has some surprises that come along when they are least expected. About three years ago there became an opportunity for this church to render some support to Diverse Harmony during a board crisis that that organization had experienced. In my capacity as administrator I was involved in that ministry. Little did I know that opportunity was to open up an amazing new world to me. Most of the world knows Diverse Harmony as a musical performance group. While music is a vehicle that binds the organization together, the important primary mission of Diverse Harmony, the nation's first gay –straight youth chorus, is to provide a safe and encouraging environment for youth who may not find that acceptance in other places in their lives. I was so taken with the joy and enthusiasm of the youth in their participation of this program that I have served on the Diverse Harmony board of directors for these past three years, and will continue to do so in retirement, because I can state without hesitation that this organization has given more joy and satisfaction back to me than I could have possibly imagined. I am going to now give a shameless plug for the Diverse Harmony concert that will take place at Benaroya Hall on February 6th. Tickets are available on the Diverse Harmony Website. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve this amazing organization.

So where does this gratitude end? Well it both begins and ends with you, the congregation of this church. After all, it's you that we all serve. There would be no reason to come in every day if it were not for you. There would be no reason to maintain this historic building if it were not for you. This whole organization would not exist if it were not for you and the support you lend to Seattle First Baptist Church in so many different ways. While financial support is important, it is not the essence of your contribution, you contribute to the soul and personality of who and what we are. You are the choir, the Diaconate, the Social Justice Group, the Commission Members the Jazz Vesper Coordinators the Wednesday Night dinner Hosts and many, many more

activities that make this church a church. Many of you have heard me say over past years that the church belongs to the congregation, not the staff or the pastors. I give thanks for you, the congregation, for your unwavering support in perpetuating the life of this 147 year old institution. We often refer to the “saints” who have gone before us. It is easy to loose tract of the fact that we are the saints that folks will be referring to on the 200th anniversary of this sanctuary. My hope is that we are thought of with same love and appreciation that we bestow on our forbearers.

On a more personal note, I am grateful to all of you who have allowed me into your more private lives to help plan weddings, memorial services, deal with financial issues solve physical access problems and generally be here to help in those ways I was able. It has been a privilege indeed to serve you, you're an appreciative congregation.

So I leave this post with my heart filled with gratitude for the rich and rewarding experience I have had over the past six years. I am confident that my friend Darren will find that same feeling during his time with us.

I suspect that many of you have experienced rewards for service similar to those I have just shared. You know that feeling of getting back more than you have given. It's a wonderful feeling and I heartily recommend it for those who may not yet have experienced it.

You remember that our scripture reading had Jesus proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor in the temple in Nazareth. I would like to think that 2016 is another year of the Lord's Favor. I don't believe that that favor automatically makes good things happen. I think that the Lord's Favor sets the stage for all of us find those ways in which we can love and serve one another.

We each have a responsibility to help make this year a favorable one.

I cannot close without expressing my gratitude and love for my wife Susan. She has supported me in every way possible during my term as administrator. She has put up with the 24/7 phone calls regarding leaky roofs or clogged plumbing. She has endured all of the evenings that called me to commission and diaconate meetings and she has been a calming influence when I have come home with various frustrations, sometimes related to remodeling. Thank you Sweetheart.

Once again, I wish to thank each of you for the opportunity to serve this institution in a fashion that has enriched my life. You don't have to be the Church Administrator to enjoy many of the same gifts as I have. This will probably happen by just being a participant in this vibrant church community.

So remember today, when you hear God's voice, I suspect it will be just a bit louder in your open heart because you are a part of this church family. Thank you.