

## Gratitude

Psalm 107:1-9  
Ephesians 2:1-10

March 11, 2018  
Faith Community

My wife, the music teacher, pointed out something a few years ago that I'd never really considered, but since then have never really forgotten. When I think of music, I consider the pitch, the notes that go up and down. But there's also rhythm. Rhythm is actually one of the foundational parts of music. It's the beat, the cadence, if you will, that flows through a given piece.

And it's not just in music that you find this. You find rhythm in poetry, literature, the change of seasons, sunrise, sunset, as old Tevye liked to point out.

For that matter, we're rhythmic beings, Fran says. Think of your heartbeat, for example. It's also how you get a crowd riled up just before the team takes the field, the candidate takes the podium or the star takes the stage.

There's wonderful rhythm in Psalm 107, a constant refrain, and it's one you'd do well to incorporate into your own life.

The Psalm begins like this:

***Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.*** (vv. 1-3 NIV)

There's the theme, and you can feel the rhythm already, as the psalmist goes from story to story.

***Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle.*** (v. 4)

Then he tells a story about that.

***Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains.*** (v. 10)

And then the story.

***Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.*** (v. 17)

***Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters.*** (v. 23)

In each case people ran into some kind of trouble. In each case they all did the same thing and experienced the same result.

***They cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.*** (v. 6)

That line is repeated four times. Whatever the situation, it always came back to God. Constantly God demonstrated his faithfulness, responding when people cried out.

There's one more piece to this pattern. They cried out to God, God answered, and then there's this:

***Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds....*** (v. 8)

There's the rhythm, friends. That happens four times as well, and the circle is complete. It's the rhythm of gratitude. It's the response that's all-important. When you follow through, when you act on what you see, hear, feel, smell, even taste, then you'll be ready for more.

Develop the discipline of seeing God's hand in everything. What you might pass off as coincidence or luck could very well be instead God's invitation to go deeper. No one will be more amazed and grateful than you for the new attitude, new outlook, and new purpose that come alive in you.

What do you do when the rhythm gets interrupted? You dig deeper.

A few years ago, my son David and I were at the Michigan/Michigan State game. Kickoff was the same time as the Tigers/Yankees playoff game at Comerica Park. What unfolded was a demonstration of the power of the human spirit.

So many fans brought radios with them that the whole place was kept up to date on how the Tigers were doing. As it turned out, it was a wonderful win for them that day, and the crowd at the Big House was always a step ahead of the stadium announcer.

Spontaneous applause would go off. There'd be cheering in the middle of a play, whoever had the ball. The

wave would be interrupted in midflight. The boredom of a commercial break would be short lived if the Tigers made a big play. Of course the biggest moment came when the game ended with a Tiger victory, and the Big House erupted before the announcer said a word. It didn't matter if you were wearing maize and blue or green and white, you passed the word and shared the joy.

Imagine if we could be like that with each other regularly. Imagine if we could become a community of rhythmic encouragement. What might be released among us? What could we become? What might we accomplish?

Listen to this:

***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*** (Eph. 2:8-9)

There's the deepest source of the rhythm of life. Plain and simple. You are loved just the way you are; there's nothing you can do to earn your way. Every stadium everywhere should echo with the racket over that. The only problem is, deep down where we really live, we don't buy it.

- You may have lingering guilt over something that you think disqualifies you.
- There's an important person in your life that you've never been able to please.
- You may have been knocked around more than your share.
- Then there are matters of age, physical handicap, health concerns, and what others think about you and what you do to try to get people to like you.

Or the biggest issue may simply be this:

Everything in our culture tells us that we are defined by what we do. Our worth is in what we produce, and the world is filled with the human wreckage that comes with a mindset like that, because it's never enough.

But here's the good news. Here's the great news. It's the passage that comes immediately after the first one I shared with you.

***For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*** (Eph. 2:10)

You don't earn your way by what you do. Instead, what you do is an expression of what's been done for you. Let me put that another way.

God is in the business of taking average people, just the way they are, with all their faults, shortcomings and zits, and working wonders in and through them. Listen to a few examples.

- Moses had a speech impediment. It also didn't help that he was a murderer.
- Rahab was a prostitute.
- David had an affair, and then had the woman's husband killed.
- Peter was impulsive to a fault.
- Paul had a hot temper.
- Abraham and Sarah were too old.
- Timothy was too young.
- Lazarus was dead.

God used them anyway.

So friends, what's the most important thing about you? If it isn't your failures, or your skills, or your looks, or your achievements, then it has to be what the apostle Paul says:

***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.***