

Thanksgiving Eve Sermon
November 26, 2013

Well, they've already started. You know—those commercials that tell you that for you to be really happy you need that certain piece of jewelry or a car wrapped up in a big, red bow. Our economy is tied up with us buying things and so we are inundated with commercials telling us that we won't be happy unless we have bright, shiny, new things. But we know that our happiness doesn't come from things and so we gather on this evening to give God thanks for what's important in our lives.

I ran across this story by Steve Goodier while reading for this sermon. In it he talks about a man—the late Dr. Fulton Oursler who would talk about the woman who took care of him when he was a child. This woman not only expressed her thanks, but felt it. Anna was a former American slave who, after being set free, was hired by his family for many years.

He remembered her sitting at the kitchen table, her hands folded and her eyes gazing upward as she prayed, "Much obliged, Lord, for my vittles." He asked her what vittles were and she replied that they were food and drink. He told her that she would get food and drink whether or not she gave thanks, and Anna said, "Yes, we'll get our vittles, but it makes 'em taste better when we're thankful."

She told him that an old preacher taught her, as a little girl, to always look for things to be grateful for. So, as soon as she awoke each morning, she asked herself, "What is the first thing I can be grateful for today?" Sometimes the smell of early morning coffee perking in the kitchen found its way to her room. On those mornings, the aroma prompted her to say, "Much obliged, Lord, for the

coffee. And much obliged, too, for the smell of it!" I know of a few people here tonight who feel the same way!

Fulton grew up and left home. One day he received a message that Anna was dying. He returned home and found her in bed with her hands folded over her white sheets, just as he had seen them folded in prayer over her white apron at the kitchen table so many times before. He wondered what she could give thanks for at a time like this. As if reading his mind, she opened her eyes and gazed at the loving faces around her bed. Then, shutting her eyes again, she said quietly, "Much obliged, Lord, for such fine friends."

Anna's uncanny ability to always find some reason to be 'much obliged' deeply influenced Fulton for she taught him a secret that many people have never learned—she taught him how to be happy.

"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." Our society wants us to work and be thankful for those things that perish, but we know better. We know that things don't and can't make us truly happy. Jesus knew this too when over two thousand years ago he told the crowds following him not to go after things that will perish, but to look for love, hope and faith. These are what endure.

The important stuff of this life is the love and support of family and friends. It's hearing for one more time Grandpa's story—even though you know it by heart—because no one can tell it like he can. It's listening to a child tell a knock-knock joke that never gets to the punch line. It's a hug and a smile when the grief is so deep that words are impossible. It's holding the hand of the one you love

knowing that they'll always be there for you. It's the laughter between friends that happens with just a glance at each other.

These are what are important in life. These are what bring us true happiness. These are what bring us closer to God. These will never perish even when we die. So close your eyes and think about the people in your life that are important to you and who bring you great joy; whether they are still here or whether they are already living with the Lord.

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