

FAITH

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What does it mean to be thankful? That question has been rolling through my mind in the last several weeks. In a world where typhoons happen, in a world where school shootings seem to occur with regularity, in a world filled with complications and tragedies, what does it mean to be thankful?

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A mother-to-be goes in for a Monday morning prenatal visit. She is to deliver her child that week and this is her last regular doctor's visit. She goes in excited, hopeful and longing to meet this life within her. But then, after watching for some time, this new little child, Thomas, is not moving within her womb. A cesarean must happen now. Thomas comes out not able to breathe on his own and must be helped into beginning the most basic of life's functions. And now the mother and we all wait. We wait to see if our hopes will be fulfilled.

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We wait to see if those few moments without breath were indeed worth all the anxiety we put into them. We wait to see what and how Thomas' life will unfold from here. We wait.

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So how to be thankful? Once upon a time it seemed so clear. Turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce. Football, crisp fall weather and soft fresh snow. The visits of friends, family and loved ones so dear. And suddenly, in the blink of an eye, how and what to be thankful for seems so muddled.

Yes, thankful for skilled doctors and nurses that brought Thomas back to life.

Yes, thankful for friends and family that gathered to support.

Yes, thankful for daily life, love and health.

But what about our little Thomas? What does thankfulness and Thanksgiving mean in the light of such a difficult time of waiting? Where do we turn?

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." Jeremiah 29:11

It is easy to be thankful when things are going well. It is easy to remember those good things of our lives and to be thankful for them. It is much harder to remember during difficult moments that God is still good, God is still involved, that God still loves.

The Israelites of the above passage from Jeremiah remembered these words during their exile. They remembered that God did not and does not desire the pain that they were experiencing but rather was working and willing God's love to be seen in the world. Their life moving forward would not be and was not easy and neither is ours. When situations like typhoon Haiyan and Thomas occur it is difficult to live with these realities and still remember to give thanks.

As you gather around your table for Thanksgiving this Thursday, as you dine on turkey, mashed potatoes, pumpkin pie and the like – may you, may we all collectively remember that thanksgiving does not involve just being thankful when things go well but following God's lead to be involved when they don't. Indeed, this is why God's Son was sent into the world in the first place.

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18