

Over and Over

Scripture

2 Thessalonians 1: 3-4

You need to know, friends, that thanking God over and over for you is not only a pleasure; it's a must. We have to do it. Your faith is growing phenomenally; your love for each other is developing wonderfully. Why, it's only right that we give thanks. We're so proud of you; you're so steady and determined in your faith despite all the hard times that have come down on you. We tell everyone we meet in the churches all about you.

(The Message)

Big Idea: Paul expresses a near constant attitude of gratitude. He is willing to name what it is he is grateful for. How hard is it for us to be thankful for what we have been blessed with ...and sometimes how little gratitude we show to those we have a great deal of need to show gratitude to ...

During World War II, one of the sure signs American's had passed through the area was a chalked head looking over a wall with the words: *Kilroy was here*.

One theory on it's origin identifies one James J. Kilroy, an American shipyard inspector, as the man behind the signature. Background: Inspectors would count the rivets in a new ship as it was under construction. Pay would be awarded based on how many rivets a worker did in a day. Unscrupulous riveters discovered that, if they started work before the inspector arrived, they could receive extra pay by erasing the chalk mark associated with the previous days work and chalking a mark farther back on the same seam, giving themselves credit for some of the previous riveter's work.

Kilroy stopped this practice by writing "Kilroy was here" at the site of each chalk mark. Because ships were sent out before they had been painted, thousands of servicemen saw his slogan on the outgoing ships and the Kilroy's legend was sparked. Afterwards, servicemen began placing the slogan on different places and especially in new captured areas or landings.¹

If “Kilroy was here” was a way of saying “Americans have passed through here”, one of the sure signs NOW that Americans have passed through that part of the world are the white granite headstones peppering the European, African, and Pacific landscapes. In Europe, I can testify they are truly ubiquitous.

Let me pause to remind each of us what today is not and at the same time is:

Veteran’s Day is not Memorial Day, but at the same time, it would be incomplete without remembering those veteran’s who we also celebrate on Memorial Day.

Veteran’s Day is not Independence Day, but at the same time, a lot of the independence we enjoy, as well as much of Europe and Asia, especially Korea and Japan, comes about at least partially through the result of American Veteran’s.

Veteran’s Day is not Thanksgiving Day, but it most certainly should be a day of Thanksgiving.

Again, Veteran’s day is not Memorial Day, but it most certainly should be at least in part, a day of memory.

My prayer is that today our words and thoughts are indeed about memory, and independence, and thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is a good place to start.

Offering thanksgiving is part of what Paul does in every letter he writes, no matter how angry he is. Often in that Thanksgiving he telegraphs for us what his theme is going to be in his letter.

Let’s remember that each of Paul’s letters were written within a specific context, a specific need is being addressed.

Here in 2nd Thessalonians the problem that is being addressed is that the small church Paul left in this most Roman city in Greece was that their devotion to Christ was causing problems to the city: insufficient allegiance was being paid to the Caesar and too much allegiance to Jesus, and it just needed to be halted or their would be economic “hell to pay”.

And inspite of the hard times, the small church has been remarkably steady during these times. Paul knows that holding fast to the core teaching of Jesus is Lord, not Caesar is often easier said, than accomplished, particularly when times get hard and tough. And Paul wants to lift up his tiny band of followers and say Thank You for being steady in hard times.

Steady in hard times. I wonder if that isn't in it's own way as ubiquitous about those who have been in the uniform services as Kilroy was here was in the 1940s. I wonder if being steady in hard times isn't represented by those Gardens of Stone that fill Europe and the Pacific. I wonder if that steady in hard times, isn't what we expect from those who serve the nation? But just because it is what we expect, I wonder if we truly say offer our thanksgiving enough for their sacrifice.

If things were easy, anyone could do it. We wouldn't ask people to prepare for this role requiriing steadiness in hard times with mottos that mean something:

“No mission too difficult, no sacrifice too great, duty first”.

“Steadfast and Loyal”.

“Deeds not words”.

Semper Fidelis – Always Faithful.

Our Country, Not Ourselves, Rock of the Marne!

And thousands more expressions that are watchwords of duty, honor, country. In the movie *A Few Good Men*, Marine Colonel Nathan Jessup provides testimony that those words speak to a people for whom words of character about character mean something. It has been said about Texas A&M that “from the outside, you can't understand it, from the inside, you can't explain it.” From my time of serviing in the military and then trying to talk to people about it who have never served or been a strong part of those who have served – and here I mean spouses -- serving in a military uniform in general has a component of that. Insiders: understand. Outsiders have their opinions but as often as not they are caricatures ... flawed and incomplete not reality.

Paul sees the world in starkly realistic terms: it is courage in the face of tremendous odds that Paul is complimenting in this particular passage from 2nd Thessalonians. And it is

part of Paul's style, even when he is frustrated or angry as in his letter to the church in Galatia or his letters to the Corinthians, to try and find *something* for which to be thankful for as he searches for the words to inspire, encourage and take them to a higher place. Here, Paul is clear on what it is he is willing to offer thanksgiving. We are told that saying thank you to those who provide steadiness during times of trouble is not a luxury – it is a veritable requirement – “a must”! It isn't something we do when we get around to it ... it is something we must do ... we have to do it ... over and over

Today is a day set aside for us to say *Thank You* – to offer a Thanksgiving -- for those who have served our country. For those who have served in the cause of freedom .. of independence ... in the rest of the world.

Jerry Zoebisch loves to read alternative histories. Histories using a logic of “what if” ... what if the Confederacy had won the Battle of Gettysburg? What if World War II had been fought without the United States getting involved? You have to wonder what this 21st Century would look like if that had happened. Part of saying we need to have a memory about something is understanding what might have happened if those men and women, like Goldie, Ken, and Billy who we celebrated last week, hadn't of answered the call from their own internal burning bush ... which called them by name.

Paul seems to know that things don't come easy ... in fact; they can be quite difficult and challenging. In the movie *The Way We Were*, the character portrayed by Robert Redford in a description of himself says that “In a way he was like the country he lived in; everything came too easily to him. But at least he knew it.” Do we know sometimes how easy we truly have it? Here I use the term freedom to describe that which is given to us by our independence.

I wonder if we haven't made the concept of freedom too easy?

I wonder if we haven't made the concept of freedom too easy, and that leads to an attitude of entitlement.

I wonder if we haven't made the concept of freedom too easy, and within that sense of entitlement, we lose the wonder – the awe -- of what it is to be free ... and to be grateful for it.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali ² is a Somali refugee who was for a short time a member of the Danish parliament. Living now in the United States, Ali was interviewed recently by a radical America is responsible for all the world's ills, broadcaster:

I've lived in countries that had no democracy, that had no founding fathers, that could not resolve, so I don't find myself in the same luxury as you. You grew up in freedom, and you can spit on freedom, because you don't know what it is not to have freedom. I haven't. I know that there are many things wrong with America, and I know there are many things wrong with Americans, but I still believe it's the best nation in the world.

Returning to Nathan Jessup in a *Few Good Men* – Colonel Jessup describes freedom as a blanket... a blanket that is far too often taken for granted ... a blanket we often fail to understand that is provided by people doing things that are challenging, and difficult, and he asks that even if we don't appreciate it or understand how it is delivered, we at least need to say “thank you” that it was, is, and will be provided.

Would that one day – freedom from oppression would be as ubiquitous in our world as the slogan Kilroy was here was in a distant age. Hope says we can accomplish that. History says that what will be ubiquitous are the headstones reminding us that Americans had passed this way and left in this foreign place, the best we had.

Paul offered that he needed to say thank you, over and over, and called it a must.

I offer that we need to say thank you, over and over, and it isn't a luxury, it is, like with Paul, a must.

Today is a day we set aside for us to reflect on what it is to be in service and, I pray that we do so by saying ‘thank you’.

How might we say thank you the other 364 days of the year ...

Questions like that are sometimes answered by looking at people like Lincoln. President Lincoln at the end of a long, terrible war offered: With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish

the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan--to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations. ³

Lincoln would suggest that caring for those who were steady in difficult times deserves our national attention.

What would you say if I told you that fully 25% of those people in this country we call “homeless” are veterans. Many Vietnam, but some are veterans of our more recent experiences in the middle east.

What would you say if I told you that in order to remain with their units, soldiers are cheating on the physical exams to see if they are suffering from traumatic brain injury. I am personally in awe of those who are so steady in the face of hard times that they think ignoring a potentially catastrophic condition to stay with their friends, but ... ⁴

The operations tempo itself is a problem. If we are going to fight a Third World War ... or as at least one writer calls it World War IV, with World War III being the Cold War, is a force structure that calls for turn around times to combat zones of only a year healthy? We celebrated the return recently of SFC Dan Hall, from his 7th deployment since 9/11.

Paul suggests to us we need an attitude of gratitude for those who are steady during difficult times ... The Army at Carson itself reports – that 1 in 5 Iraq returnees to Carson received a traumatic brain injury. 1 in 5 Iraq returnees will have a behavioral health issue ...

Would that our physical, and tangible thank you show some substance in the form of a force large enough to reduce turn around time; a clearer understanding of the impact of the current operations tempo on lives, marriages and families; a properly staffed and prepared support structure that recognizes the need for health and spiritual professionals to assist with the transition back into life in the land of the free, and the home of the brave.

Independence and Freedom often come at a terrible price. We need to remember that and keep it as part of our national DNA to have that terrible price be part of our corporate memory banks. An attitude of gratitude extended towards those who provide that blanket of freedom needs to be part of that national DNA that doesn't let our memory banks think that freedom and independence are easy. *They ... are ... not.*

Kilroy was here was a symbol that Americans passed through an area.

Often the result of that passing through was a world transformed by their steadiness and reliability in hard, tough times.

Would that Kilroy and his ubiquitous presence would be replaced with a different ubiquitous presence – an attitude of gratitude that must say thank you, over and over.

An attitude of gratitude that is demonstrated by a nation that honors her veterans by truly binding up the wounds of the combatant, and truly caring for the widow and orphan.

Saying Thank You – fully saying Thank You – is in reality never easy ... but it is something we need to do ... and if what I am reading is accurate ... something we need to remember and re-start.

Paul tells the church at Thessalonica: *You need to know, friends, that thanking God over and over for you is not only a pleasure; it's a must. We have to do it. Your faith is growing phenomenally; your love for each other is developing wonderfully. Why, it's only right that we give thanks. We're so proud of you; you're so steady and determined in your faith despite all the hard times that have come down on you. We tell everyone we meet in the churches all about you.*

(The Message)

May the day come where we no longer have to send none of our best into harm's way ... but until that day comes .. and with God's Grace the lamb will one day lie down with the lion ... let's become a place which honors those who have been steady and determined during hard times. A place which says we are thanking God for you, over and over and lives out that thankfulness .. and that thankfulness is as ubiquitous as the presence of Kilroy in a World War II Europe ... may we truly tell everyone we meet .. in the churches and outside of them ... that we are truly grateful for their steadiness and determination in the face of hard times and it is only right for us to give thanks .. and show them how proud we are of them Let us pray.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kilroy_was_here

² Ayaan: (disarming him with a smile before swooping in for the final devastating death blow) I've read de Tocqueville, and I've read about democracy, and I've lived in countries that had no democracy, that had no founding fathers, that could not resolve, so I don't find myself in the same luxury as you. You grew up in freedom, and you can spit on freedom, because you don't know what it is not to have freedom. I haven't. I know that there are many things wrong with America, and I know there are many things wrong with Americans, but I still believe it's the best nation in the world.

³ With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan--to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations. – Lincoln 2nd Inaugural.

⁴ Gregg Zoroya of *USA Today* reports that [servicemembers are cheating on the tests that help determine if they're suffering from traumatic brain injury](#) (TBI) so that they can remain with their units. While their *esprit de corps* is admirable, it is vitally important that TBI be detected early so that the treatment and rehabilitation of this condition can have the maximum impact. It appears from Zoroya's report that the military is already taking the necessary steps to prevent cheating and ensure the most accurate results of testing.