

# February Greetings!



Richard Ondicho's Newsletter 1/2025

5.2.2025

The Bible gives us countless examples of gratitude as a central aspect of worship. Psalm 100:4 (ESV) declares, **“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!”** This verse reminds us that our approach to God should be marked by thanksgiving. God's grace draws us into His presence, **and our response is gratitude for the many gifts of forgiveness and new life He has giving us in Jesus Christ.** Gratitude is more than just a feeling—it's a response to the incredible grace we have received from God through Jesus Christ.

Reflecting on my own life, I've slowly come to realize there has almost never been a time in my life when I wasn't struggling with something, enduring something, or working through some hardship. I have understood that those struggles are attention-grabbing and pull my focus inward. Waiting for a calm in the storm, some season of peace often means I will be waiting quite some time.

Further, the message of the Bible time and again is that gratitude is not reserved for times of good, plenty, or peace, but at all times. St. Paul urges us in Philippians 4:4, **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”** Just a little later in verse in verse 6 he will encourage us to include thanksgiving in the midst of our regular prayers to God. Paul is even more blunt in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, **“give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”** He says this even though, manifestly in his life and in the lives of people around him, the circumstances were often bad, hard, difficult, or challenging to faith.

Taking the time to **deliberately and purposefully thank God in spite of any number of reasons that make it hard re-orient our attitudes and our hearts.** Giving thanks in the midst of trial is a kind of **confession to God that recognizes his good and gracious love.** More than that, it helps us remember God's promises which transcend the situation. It's terribly hard to thank God while dying, but if we believe and confess the promise of the resurrection in Jesus, we remember that death will not have the final victory. I can assure you that it is a struggle to thank God while feeling overwhelmed and struggling, but **thanking God reminds us that his love for us as his children is more valuable than the short-lived trial before us.**

I have come to believe I should be grateful that God in His grace and mercy preserves, lifts up, and builds up his people. With some reflection and thought, **I'm certain you have many things worth thanking and praising God for.** Whether you're experiencing joy or hardship, you have countless reasons to give thanks.

In year Ad 2025 let's spend a moment in a day cultivating a heart of gratitude for all that God has given us, through His creation, His people, and most of all, through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

I started working for SLEY 9 years ago. In some way it feels like I just started working as a missionary the other day. With gratitude I thank God for carrying me through these 9 years. During this period, I have met so many people searching for purpose of life, some have come with desire to understand who God is while others have come out of curiosity to see what a Christian looks like. Some have come by themselves while others have been referred by a friend. At times we have heard tourist attending our Divine service some of them have kept contact after returning to their various countries. By God's sheer grace I have read Luther's small Catechism over and over again. I have been teaching on the ten commands over and over and over again. I have been preaching most of the Sundays of the Church year, I have sung hymns from all ages, I have been encouraged to have meditation all the time. All these events and activities in Luther-Church have built my Christian commitments.

Now that the Lord has brought us to the year 2025, I did not make any new year resolutions because I have come to know that most of the New year resolutions that people make don't last longer than two months. I let God lead and guide me.

Currently in our International congregation we have continued to compose a choir which sings every single Sunday. It has been good that the number is reasonable, and we pray that God will bring interested people. Over the past three weeks, I have continued having the Baptism class. Two weeks ago, a couple from Sri Lanka were invited into our service by a Finnish Christian. They joined the baptism and seemingly. In return they shared at their group that they found a Church that is welcoming. Out of that a Christian couple from Sri Lanka joined and were very happy to find us. They just moved here and did not know any English service where they can commit. The joy that was on their faces was so encouraging. I came to realize that in Finland there is about 800 immigrants from Sri-Lanka and most of them are Buddhists. God is still working in our small Congregation.

Thanks for keeping me and our Congregation in your prayers in the past years. If possible, continue to pray that we keep on reaching out to the lost who have come to Finland. Helsinki is a huge place, and we don't know how many people are searching for a Church and a spiritual home.

In Christ I remain His servant and yours.

***Riku***

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