

Context and Vision

As we are well into the month of November, the month when we take a day to give thanks for the good things of life, I want to start by saying thank you to John Knox Presbytery for my recent Renewal leave. It was indeed a time to relax and refresh myself for this work which we share as servants in this part of God's church known as the PC(USA). This leave afforded me the time to go on a pilgrimage/vacation to Ireland and Scotland with my wife Janet. I experienced many wonderful things on that trip including one that demonstrated to me the importance of a sense of gratitude.

We discovered in Scotland the roads are very narrow, literally room for just one vehicle at a time. While traveling these roads, drivers would watch for little sidings where one could pull over allowing the other car to pass. Sometimes when going around a curve a sign would inform drivers that a siding was coming up soon. Sitting in the back of a bus I spotted just such a sign for the first time. Because I wasn't familiar with these signs, and I think because of the context of my life and work I thought we had just passed a sign that read, **PASSING PEACE**. The sign certainly caught my attention. Why would such a sign be on the highway? It certainly seemed unlikely that drivers would be stopping along the road to offer greetings to other travelers. Within a few minutes we spotted another sign that solved the puzzle; the sign read **PASSING PLACE**.

There is an old saying that asserts; When one is a hammer, all the world looks like a nail. In other words, your context heavily influences your view of all the world. I was slightly amused and perhaps a bit embarrassed that my view of the world would lead to such a silly assumption about the road sign. But then as I thought about it, I like having that worldview. A view that is concerned with relationships and community. A view that takes seriously, the presence and the grace of God. A view that looks for opportunities to connect with others. I am not a hammer, but I am a Christian, that is the context that influences my worldview.

I don't know who first coined the term, "an attitude of gratitude" but it is one that certainly fits well within the Christian context. I am thankful for a number of things, among them the opportunity to renew for my work in JKP, the opportunity to work with such fine colleagues and churches, the opportunity to serve God in this time and place, and on and on. I encourage you to cherish, embrace, and develop that context within you that allows for God, community, and thankfulness. It is a wonderful blessing that makes life all the sweeter, an important trait in days such as these. Happy Thanksgiving one and all!

Chaz Ruark