



KIRKLAND VILLAGE

a part of PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

November 29, 2009

Andrew S. Kimmel, M.D.
800 Ostrum Street, Suite No. 100
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 18015

Dear Dr. Kimmel,

Each year – on Thanksgiving Sunday – I preach an “open letter” to someone who has touched and blessed my life. Over the years, it has been my privilege to “give thanks,” for: heroes in ministry, mentors, teachers, and scout leaders.

Last week, on Sunday, November 22 – the people of Kirkland Village (where I have served as chaplain for nine and a half years) – heard my expressions of gratitude ... which I now send to you through the enclosed manuscript.

It is my hope that these words will bring a bit of joy to your day. They are sent with my love and gratitude.

Again, thank you, Dr. Kimmel – for your healing presence in my life!

Cordially,

Rev. Allen H. Hermansader,
Senior Chaplain

AN OPEN LETTER TO MY SURGEON
Thanksgiving Sunday, November 22, 2009
I. Thessalonians 5: 12-18

Let us pray:

We hear these life-changing words, O God; and they are powerful words indeed. Words like: compassion. Kindness. Patience. Forgiveness. And love. And beyond these words, O Lord, we are reminded that you want for us to be a thankful people ... a people of genuine gratitude. So come to us, we pray, that these words might come alive within us; for You are our God and we are grateful. In the name of your Son. Amen.

This is an open letter to my surgeon that begins with these words ...

Dear Dr. Kimmel: With the coming of Thanksgiving day so very near I want to take just a couple of moments, here in worship, to give special thanks to God and to you as well, for a gift I have taken for granted ... for far too many years ... the gift of sight. My sight.

You see, it was a pretty staggering moment when, several months ago, I awakened, on a Saturday morning, to discover that I had something floating in my left eye. A "floater" - I came to learn. Not at all unusual for those of us who are getting older. But something that was plenty distressing nevertheless. Particularly for someone with a "history" like mine. For as you know, back in 1991, I had to have surgery for a torn retina in my right eye and a detached retina in my left.

And that was the time when I came to learn some rather staggering news - that left untreated - this *condition* of mine

would be life-changing and I would lose my sight.

So there I sat, in your office, just months ago - saying, once again: "Oh, how in the world can this be happening *again*??"

Well, while I'm not sure that I'll ever have a satisfactory answer, this much I do know - that from the moment I met you I knew (deep within) that I was in the hands of one very fine human being. And in the quiet of my heart, I gave thanks to God for you, Doctor Kimmel.

Indeed. Your presence in my life - from that first moment back in the Spring - has meant more to me than you will ever know. And the moments we have spent together since (there at your office and in the hospital too) have changed my life forever. You see, Doctor - if the truth were known, I've been one of those people who has (sometimes) taken for granted the great blessings of life.

Vision? Yes, I have vision. Of course I can see!!

And yet, here today, I find myself wondering: in the course of 55 years - how often have I stopped to give thanks to God for the ability to "see life" all around me?!

How often?

I look into the eyes of my wife (who loves me with all of the bumps and bruises I bring into our marriage) but, do I "see" her? Or, I watch my three kids (each one on their own journey in life) but, do I "really see" them? I gaze at the morning sun (rising in the East - bringing light to some late Fall color) but, once again, do I "see the world?"

DO I SEE IT AS GOD WANTS ME TO??

And how am I doing, I wonder? How am I doing with the great gift of vision ... a gift God gave me 55 years ago!!?? How am I doing, really??

There is a favorite scene ... a scene from Thornton Wilder's play, OUR TOWN - a scene that has always had a special place in my heart. And perhaps now I know why!! For in that play, a young woman named Emily - Emily Webb - dies.

And in the spirit-world - Emily is re-united with loved ones and friends. One day, however, one day - quite out of the blue - this dear soul decides she wants to return to life (life in the world).

Now, they plead with her (the other spirits do) not to go. But her heart is set on returning to the world; and her determined mind will not be changed.

Consequently, she is told that she can choose one day out of the life (she once lived here on earth). And thinking it over, very carefully, Emily chooses to re-live her twelfth birthday here in the world.

And so it is. Her wish granted, she returns to the world. Now, while Emily knows the future and can see and hear everything around her, the people she visits are not aware of her spirit-presence.

And oh, here in the world, Emily thinks everything seems *so incredible*. So full of wonder!! Her mother's sunflowers!! (Oh how glorious!) Freshly ironed dresses. The clock, ticking. Food. The smell of coffee! And she thinks to herself: "Oh, dear earth - you are just too wonderful for anyone realize!!"

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She also becomes *aware* that *time* is moving right along, very quickly.

And with some degree of sorrow (deep within) - Emily watches those - near and dear to her touch - taking everything for granted. Here! They are simply letting life go by without ever living. WITHOUT REALLY LIVING!!!

Finally then. When the day comes to an end, Emily - returns to the spirit world. And turning to her friends there, she says: "Oh. Oh, human beings are such *blind* people!!" To which a friend, there in the spirit world, replies: "And now you know, Emily. Now you know that's what it was to be alive ... to spend and waste time as though you had a million years!!"

Well you know, Dr. Kimmel - as I stand here before my cherished congregation (here at Kirkland) on this Thanksgiving Sunday, I somehow can't help but confess that for far too many years I have been one of Emily's family!! Letting "life" go by without really "seeing" ... and sometimes, without really "living" too!!

But in these days of November, following my laser surgery and visits to your office, I have, once again, reason to give thanks!!

For life (in all of its *joy* and in all of its *challenge*) ... *life is a gift*. My wife and kids ... my family and friends ... these are a gift. This dear congregation (whose love has been so generous) these dear ones before me ... a gift from heaven!!

And suddenly. Suddenly, I hear the voice of God, whispering to my heart, reminding me: "Every day, Allen ... every single day is a gift. Remember! A gift from heaven above!!"

And so on this Thanksgiving Sunday, Dr. Kimmel - I want to take this moment to say quite simply: "Thank You." Thanks for being you! Thank you for the hours and hours of study, year after year, you have given to become the physician you are!!

Thank you, Dr. Kimmel - for dedicating your life to the ministry of medicine!! And most of all, thank you - for being my doctor!! And for allowing me another chance to "see life" - (to see it in a new kind of way) through the eyes of gratitude.

For in the words of one very fine teacher: "When it comes to Thanksgiving - most people fall into one of two classes: those who *take* things for granted ... and those who *receive* things with *gratitude*!!

And there you have it. For by the grace of God - guiding your hands - I now have a second chance in life: an opportunity not to *take* things for granted, but to *receive* things with gratitude!!

You have my personal regard, Dr. Kimmel; the love of my family and the one who writes this letter. But perhaps, most of all - you have my gratitude!!

Happy Thanksgiving, dear friend. And may God bless you!!

Let us pray:

Generous and Gracious God: how do we ever begin to put into words the feelings of our hearts?

Particularly, as we are reminded - that everything we are and everything we have ... have come from your hand??

Oh bless us, we pray, that we might be and become - your thankful people. In Jesus' name. Amen.