

Thanksgiving – 2022

"The God-Pleasing Perspective of Thanksgiving"

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

Grace, mercy and peace – certainly three of God's greatest gifts for which we do well to give thanks – these three gifts be multiplied to each of you as you give thanks to your Savior God for his innumerable blessings on this Thanksgiving Eve. Amen.

Dear Fellow Recipients of God's unlimited generosity:

Our text for this special service of thanksgiving is found in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, the Third Chapter:

^{ESV} **Ephesians 3:14-21** *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ ¶ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

These are the very words of God. They are thus, in and of themselves, precious *gifts* that we never want to take for granted. To help prepare our hearts for the study of these words, and to remind us of their divine origin, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

There are obviously many bad things about the internet. There are also many good and positive benefits – one of which is the fact that we get to see some amazing things, things that we would never otherwise have seen. We bring up two such "amazements" this evening because they have application to Thanksgiving - sidewalk art and fence art. Ever seen them? If not, Google them sometime. It's pretty remarkable stuff. Sidewalk art is chalk drawings on a street or sidewalk made to look three

dimensional – so much so that you would swear there is, say, a six-foot long coke bottle laying on the sidewalk, or a huge crater out of which Batman and Robin are climbing. Fence art is equally amazing. Splotches of paint on the side of wrought iron rail fences that mean nothing until you see the fence almost from the side, where all the rails are lined up, where suddenly all those blotches become an amazing, cohesive picture.

Both of these have application to our sermon theme this evening because these murals only make sense when viewed from the intended angle. When you look at them from the side or back, they don't look like much of anything at all. In fact they look rather odd and disjointed. When viewed from the right angle – incredible.

This is, in fact, exactly why we bring up something like this on this Thanksgiving Eve. To do Thanksgiving right (to do it the way our God intends) perspective is everything. Looking forward, for example, gives you the wrong perspective for giving thanks. It skews and distorts the whole intention or goal of the event. Christian thanksgiving has almost nothing to do with the future. It has everything to do with the past. Christians give thanks to our God for the "done deals" of this life. The future, on the other hand, is all about trust.

Here's why that's so important. The godless, going back as far as recorded history will take us, have always treated the giving of thanks as a means to help secure their good fortune going forward. For them it was typically always about the future, never about the past. The pagans in Old Testament times, for example, did not offer their human sacrifices to their idols in thanks for what has already been given to them but to win the favor of their gods going forward. Last year's crop was already in their barns or stomachs. What they were worried about was next year's harvest.

Things haven't changed all that much with unbelievers, which is why we need to acknowledge the temptation, and work to avoid it. Thanksgiving is not about paying it forward. Our God doesn't bless us because we earn it by giving thanks. When we do it right, we simply thank our God for having given to us what we have in no way earned or deserved. In that sense the correct perspective is always looking backwards when we give thanks.

Consider the familiar account of the Ten Lepers, where ten were healed but only one returned to give thanks. Why do you think 90% of those healed failed to return to thank Jesus for what he had done for

them? Probably because they had gotten all that they wanted from Jesus. They wanted Jesus to heal them. He did that, so they were done with him. That's also what makes the return of the one such a great example of pure, true thanksgiving. He wasn't clearing the path for future benefits. He had already received what he wanted, and he simply wanted to thank Jesus for it.

That's not to say that a proper backwards looking thanksgiving has nothing whatsoever to do with the future. It does. Here's how. As we mentioned earlier, the future is all about trust. When the present looks frightening, gloomy, depressing, how can a child of God ever look forward with unshakable trust?

Every single person hearing or reading these words can list countless examples of "done deals" in your lives that lend themselves to an ongoing sense of optimism going forward. By "done deal" we mean those things that have already been given to us – blessings that have already been received. A partial list would include your faith, your spouse, your children, parents, house, standard of living, creature comforts, a veritable plethora of luxuries, toys (for young and old), and on and on. Your senses all work - you can see, hear, taste, and feel. It can be something as simple as the fish or deer that *didn't* get away, or the unbelievable sale you got on that appliance that had to be replaced on short notice, to something as big as the fact that you have never known a day in your entire life when you didn't have enough to eat. Obviously this is but a tiny fraction of all that God has done for us, but you get the point.

Yet, again, since true thanksgiving is about the blessings of the past, how does an evaluation of what God has done in the past help to comfort us concerning the future?

In Psalm 77 the Psalmist told of his depression at the current state of affairs in his life and of his pessimism regarding the future. Can you guess what changed his attitude? Hear his solution in his own words: ***"Then I said, I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High. ¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. ¹² I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds."*** Psalm 77:10-12 The Psalm writer's solution was to take a backwards look at what God has done in the past. The obvious lesson that he re-learned was that the God who did such great things in the past could obviously be trusted to care for him also in the future.

So also with you and me. Whenever we find ourselves caught up in a pessimistic or depressed world-view, we would do well to ask ourselves,

"What has God ever done in the past to deserve such pessimism from us? When has our God ever demonstrated a lack of love toward us? When has he ever failed to provide us even more than we need? When has he ever let us down? What then justifies any sort of doubt going forward?"

It is, unfortunately, typical of sinful mankind to look at all that we have been given and to lightly pass it off with an *"Oh that"* and then to follow it up immediately with a *"Yes but what about...?"* – pointing to something that we "lack," or something that we find difficult or threatening in the future. Yet understand that our God is our loving, wise, *Good Shepherd*. The denials of the past are themselves examples of blessings for which we owe him our thanks. Who here wasn't denied something as a child (or as an adult for that matter) that would almost certainly have been very bad for you? What parent here hasn't done the same for your own children – denying what would have been harmful for them? We should expect no less from our *Heavenly Father*. You and I will never know all of the ways our God protected us from unseen dangers (both temporal and spiritual) by denying us those things that *he knew* would harm us. Having carried us safely to this point in our lives, even the times where God has said "No!" are, in themselves, also "done deals." Even these are in-the-bank good things from our God that can never be taken from us. They are gifts that have already been given by God and received by us.

Now you want to know the best part? The best part is that we haven't even gotten to the best part yet. So far we've only briefly touched on the here and now; we haven't even begun to talk about the hereafter – which is also a "done deal." Our single greatest blessing is the fact that Jesus Christ has earned forgiveness for every single human being. Nothing can ever change or undo what Jesus has done. Nothing can make his death on the cross something less than total victory over sin and Satan and the full and complete payment for all of our sins. What Jesus has already done for us is an *accomplished fact* in the eyes of God, and the doubt or denial of the unbelievers doesn't change these divine truths. Truly God has been good to us!

This also brings us to our text for this evening and to the absolute best perspective for thanksgiving. The best way to celebrate thanksgiving is to look backwards, true; but the best way to do *that* is on our knees. So also Paul in our text: ***For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your***

inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith-- that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

God's greatest gift to mankind is the cross, and the best view of the cross of Christ is from below, from our knees. True thankfulness is simply not possible without abject humility. Pride causes us to imagine that we are worthy or deserving of what God has done for us – *and more*. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are so amazed at what God has done for us *precisely because* we recognize that we deserve exactly the opposite from him – hard times on earth and an eternity of torment in hell. Because of our actions, our sin, *that* would represent perfect justice.

Pride, on the other hand, sees all of what God has done as "*God doing right by us.*" That's worse than silly. It's sin of the most God-displeasing sort. In fact what makes all that our God has given to us and all that he has done for us so incredible, so amazing, is the fact that he owed us nothing, and we rightly deserve only punishment and hardship from his hand.

Instead, our God has given us *always* and *only* good. Difficult at times, but only because he knew that difficult is what, at that point in time, was necessary. What an absolute joy and comfort to walk always in the pure joy and comfort of our generous, loving, all-knowing God.

Look at all that God has done for you, and let the final words of our text fill your heart: ***Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.***

The Sermon Text:

^{ESV} Ephesians 3:14-21 *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ ¶ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

"The God-Pleasing Perspective of Thanksgiving"

The Offertory – [Sung by All]
Supplement Insert, page 16

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 425 (Stanzas 5-6) (*Red Hymnal*)
"All Depends on Our Possessing"

The Thanksgiving Confession of Faith (*See bulletin insert*)

The Thanksgiving Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 558 (*Second Tune*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night"

Silent Prayer



**St Paul Lutheran Church
Bismarck, North Dakota**

Thanksgiving 2022

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Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

Thanksgiving Service – November 23, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 39 (*Red Hymnal*)
"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

The Confession of Sins and Absolution

Pastor: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Congregation: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Pastor: From the conviction of our hearts we confess together:

All: Almighty God, merciful Father, we confess that we were conceived and born with sin. We further confess that we have, since birth, actively sinned against you by our thoughts, words, and actions. We are sorry for our countless sins, and we humble ourselves before your holy presence. Forgive us, for Jesus' sake, and renew us by your Holy Spirit.

Pastor: God the Father has indeed declared you to be not guilty for Jesus' sake. By his command and according to his authority, I announce to you his divine decree that your sins are forgiven, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**[Sung By All] Praise God from whom all blessings flow!
Praise Him, all creatures here below!
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host!
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!**

The Prayer of the Day

The Psalm of the Day - Psalm 67 (*See bulletin insert*)

The Scripture Lessons:

The First Lesson: ^{ESV} (1 Timothy 2:1-4) First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

[Sung By All]

**Now thank we all our God With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, In Whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mothers' arms, Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today.**

The Second Lesson: ^{ESV} (Luke 12:13-23) Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." ²² And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

[Sung By All]

**Oh may this bounteous God Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts And blessed peace to cheer us,
And keep us in His grace, And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills, in this world and the next.**

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 425 (Stanzas 1-2, 4) (*Red Hymnal*)
"All Depends on Our Possessing"

