

Thanksgiving – 2024

"The 'Why' of Thanksgiving"

Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Grace, mercy and peace – certainly three of God's greatest gifts for which we do well to give thanks – may these 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:

We'll start with a couple of guarantees. First, at random and with no introduction or background, say *"Thank you"* to someone – family member, friend, co-worker, whomever. Their response is guaranteed to be: *"For what?"* It's just a given, isn't it. Thank someone, and they want to know what you are thanking them for. The second guarantee is that you've never met a single person who has not gone fishing. Not one. The only difference is what they've fished *for*. We're talking gratitude, acknowledgement, appreciation and praise, not fish. We bait our hook with the "why" of gratitude and dangle it in front of the recipient of our generosity or service. *"I'm glad you seem to like the meal. It took me all day to prepare it." "Oh, by the way, I changed the oil in your car yesterday and reset the service engine light." "Mommy, did you like the picture I colored for you?"*

Why do we do that? Because from little on we share a universal need to be appreciated. Human beings can bear up under a tremendous load and will put up with tremendous adversity and hardship when they possess just one thing from those they serve: gratitude. Take that away, and the will to carry on the struggle often goes with it.

Our God also wants to see gratitude in those he blesses, but with God it's different. Where you and I crave appreciation and gratitude because it makes *us* feel better, God has no such need or lack. As in all things, God wants to see thankfulness in his children simply because it is the right thing to do and the only acceptable way to be. That's probably why we find an interesting fact whenever God in his Word calls for thanksgiving from his children: he almost always gives us the *why*. In other words, he demonstrates to us just exactly *why* grateful is the right way for us to be.

Our text for this special service of thanksgiving is a perfect example of our God giving his people *"The 'why' of thanksgiving"*. That text is found in the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, the 8th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 8:1-10** *"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. ² And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. ⁶ So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, ⁸ a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, ⁹ a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. ¹⁰ And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.*

This is God's Word. It is thus, in and of itself, a precious *gift* that we never want to take for granted or to receive without thanksgiving. To help prepare our hearts for the study of God's Word, to remind us of its divine origin, and as a reminder to receive his Word with gratitude, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Pretty hard to miss *"the 'why' of thanksgiving"* in our text for this evening, isn't it? God had just rescued his children from their 400 years of slavery in Egypt and 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. He wasn't bringing the Jews into just another wilderness that they could call their own – one that needed to be tamed and developed with blood, sweat, and tears. He was giving them prime real estate that was *move-in ready*. Others had already done all the heavy lifting of taming the land. What the Jews were about to receive stood in sharp contrast to the wilderness in which they had been wandering for the past four decades. Not only was the land they were receiving rich in potential (good soil, abundant minerals, flowing streams and springs, etc.) the

vineyards, the farms, and the groves had already been established. The wells had already been dug. The fortifications, winepresses, and houses had already been built. All they had to do was move in and reap the bounty that the land was already producing.

But there's another "why of thanksgiving" in our text that is as unusual as it is easy to miss. Our God here reminds his children to be thankful for – and because of – his commandments.

This is a bit jarring if we actually stop to think about it. It's easy to recognize the *why of thanksgiving* when someone tells us what they have already done *for* us; it's much harder to recognize when someone is telling us what they are demanding *from* us. Good parents do this all the time with their children, and those children almost universally have a hard time understanding why they should be thankful for what their parents are demanding from them.

Parents are commanded by God to bring up their children **"in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."** (Ephesians 6:4) Wise parents know that this isn't typically the path that children naturally choose on their own. Children have to be trained both to recognize and follow that path. All of us are born selfish and self-centered. That has to be trained out of us. All of us are born with a natural inclination toward laziness and carelessness – which also must be trained out of us. All of us are born with a natural disposition toward entitlement and ingratitude. These, too, parents have to purge.

All of this explains why good parents regularly attach a common label or clause to their rules: *"Just do it. Someday you will thank me for it."*

So it was with God in connection with the Jews, and so also it is with God in his dealings with you and me today. God gave his commandments to the Children of Israel not as an attempt to supply himself with something he lacked but so that he could continue to provide his children with all of the good things that *they* needed. Our text therefore begins with God's own *"Just do it. Someday you will thank me for it":* **"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers."** The good land that God was taking from its prior inhabitants wasn't taken from them because of their piety, morality, and godliness. It was taken from them because of their sin, rebellion, and unbelief. God therefore began with a warning to his children that the same would happen to them if they chose to go down that same road.

Clearly the same warning needs to be repeated to the citizens of our own country. All of us share this common tendency toward evil. Nor is that tendency easily trained out of us. God gave the Jews a generous, behind-the-curtain look at his training techniques in our text when he said to them: ***And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD... Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. ⁶ So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him.***

God knew then, as God knows now, that no matter how great or how seemingly permanent the blessing, man forfeits God's favor when he turns against his Creator. God didn't want that for Israel, which is *why* in our text he gave them the means to avoid that catastrophe. This is, again, his simple: *"Just do it. Someday you will thank me for it."*

God hereby gave the Jews the *"why of thanksgiving"; that is, he spelled out for them exactly why they should be thankful.* This is, in fact, anything but rare when we look through the pages of God's Word. Giving the *"why of thanksgiving"* is actually the rule, rather than the exception. Consider just a few of the dozens of examples, starting with our common table prayer: ***Oh give thanks to the LORD! Why? For he is good; for his mercy (steadfast love) endures forever!*** (1 Chronicles 16:34) So many of the Psalms begin with a simple call for praise and thanksgiving, and the rest of the Psalm provides the why. Psalm 103:1-5: ***Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,*** (and here comes the why) ***who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ⁵ who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*** So also through Paul, the Holy Spirit adds his "why" to the call for thanksgiving: ***Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."*** Then the why: ***For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells***

bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." (Colossians 2:6-7,9-10) Finally also from our text: ***... You shall bless the LORD your God...***" Why? Because ***"you shall eat and be full, and for the good land he has given you."***

Far from obscure or difficult, we would have to work hard not to see the application in all of this to our own country, our own lives. Their "why" is also our "why": ***For the LORD your God has also brought us into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, ⁸ a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, ⁹ a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper...*** and silver, and gold, and oil.

God clearly wants to bless his children, but the hard lesson we learned from the Children of Israel who first heard the words of our text is that God cannot and will not continue his blessings in the face of continued rebellion, disobedience and thanklessness.

And yet it's here that we stumble upon the greatest "why" of thanksgiving, for in the very face of our sin, our disobedience, our rebellion, God also has provided. The greatest "why" of thanksgiving – the most obvious reason to give thanks, now and always – is God's solution to our sin problem. God's greatest gift to mankind is the cross, and the gift of his Son who hung on that cross. We have no greater reason to thank our God than when we consider not what he gives us for our bodies, but for what he has given for our souls – what we have been given *despite* what we have deserved. While material gifts will pass away, the gifts that are ours through faith in Jesus Christ will never end.

That is our "good land" into which our Savior is leading us. How close each of us stands to the door of that inheritance we cannot know. What we can know, with thanksgiving, is that the God who has given us all of these other things will not now withhold whatever good thing, or whatever discipline, is necessary to finish the job he began and to deliver us safely home.

To that God, our God, we offer our thanks, now and always, acknowledging with the Apostle Paul in Romans 11 the "why" of our thanksgiving: ***"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever."*** Amen.

The Sermon Text:

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 8:1-10** *"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. ² And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. ⁶ So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, ⁸ a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, ⁹ a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. ¹⁰ And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.*

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

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 425 (Stanzas 1-2, 5-6) *(Red Hymnal)*
"All Depends on Our Possessing"

The Thanksgiving Confession of Faith *(Projected on screens)*

The Thanksgiving Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 798 (Verses 1 & 4) *(Brown Hymnal)*
"God, We Praise You"

Silent Prayer



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

Thanksgiving 2024

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

Thanksgiving Service – November 27, 2024

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 65 *(Projected on Screens)*

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}(1 Chronicles 16:23-36) Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. ²⁴ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ²⁵ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be feared above all gods. ²⁶ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. ²⁷ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place. ²⁸ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! ²⁹ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; ³⁰ tremble before him, all the earth; yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. ³¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!" ³² Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! ³³ Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. ³⁴ Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! ³⁵ Say also: "Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather and deliver us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. ³⁶ Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting!"

[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 - 941 *(LSB Hymnal) (Congregation joins Stanzas 3-4)*
"We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God"