

Thanksgiving – 2025

"Rightly Condemned, Rightly Pardoned"

Text: Romans 8:1-11

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

Our text for this special Thanksgiving service is found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the 8th Chapter:

^{ESV}(**Romans 8:1-11**) ***There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.***

This is the Word of God. 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 these words, to remind us of their divine origin, and as a reminder to receive them with thanksgiving, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Comparative or relative gratitude is as wrong as it is common. Instead of starting from nothing, and then being truly thankful for everything that you have, comparative or relative gratitude involves looking around at what others have and making that your starting point, your point of reference. If my stuff is better, I have reason to be thankful. If not, well, I hope those who have more or better appreciate what they have and are thankful. Comparative/relative gratitude leads us to think things like, *"I have a home, but it's not as nice as other homes."* *"I have a vehicle to drive, but many drive newer and fancier vehicles."* *"I have enough food, but I can't afford what others can buy at the grocery store."* There is, in fact, very little in life that cannot be outshined by something bigger or better. The result, by that standard, is that we imagine that we have nothing at all for which to be thankful.

What must our God think when he, in his infinite wisdom and boundless love for his children, blesses us with what he knows to be exactly what is best for us, only to be rewarded with grumbling and ingratitude or, at best, lack of appreciation simply because we do not have more, or better. Or when we disparage what he has given us because it, for whatever reason, does not measure up to our standards, or to what we imagine that we deserve.

This evening, though, we are not going to spend our time together trying to enumerate and thereby conjure up gratitude for our countless material blessings. I trust you will all take time tomorrow to do that. Better still, that you will struggle to live in a constant state of thanksgiving for God's abundant material blessings. This evening we are going to try to illustrate, as individually and acutely as we possibly can, something a little different.

In this, I am going to need your help. You must actively participate, or you will very likely not find it of any great value. With undivided attention and full participation, you will.

First, allow yourself to be carried, in your minds, to a situation, a dilemma – a terrible dilemma. Something of a living nightmare that is nonetheless very real.

Picture yourself in this situation. Make it as real as you possibly can. In the middle of the night, there is a thunderous crash at your front door, followed immediately by six heavily armed men storming into your bedroom, pointing their weapons at you, shouting "Police!" and

yelling at you to show them your hands. Dazed and confused, you realize that you are one false move from being shot and killed.

A second thought then floods over you. This is not a mistake. This is not a case of mistaken identity. They don't have the wrong house. You've been caught, and there is no escape. For so long you've been thinking that maybe you've gotten away with it. Guilt and dread wash over you as realize you have not. Struggle to go to that place in your minds. You are guilty, and you've been caught.

Roughly handcuffed and mirandized – something you imagined happened only to others – you are shoved into the back of a prisoner transport vehicle and taken to a place you never imagined you would see – the booking room of the police station. Finger-printed and photographed, you are led to another place you never imagined you would see – the inside of a holding cell. For the first time in your life, your freedom has been taken from you. You are a prisoner. The lights are unceremoniously turned off and you are alone with your thoughts. The dread in your very soul is overwhelming, compounded immeasurably by the fact that there is no doubt whatsoever of your guilt. Everyone that you loved, everything that you enjoyed, every plan you made for the future – all is gone. Lost. Forfeited in an instant. You are alone. Your future is utterly bleak and absolutely terrifying.

You sleep very little that night, and then only fitfully. In the morning you are introduced to your court-appointed attorney. After looking at the evidence against you, he gives you two options. 1) Plead not guilty and fight the charges – with little or no hope of success, or 2) Plead guilty and throw yourself on the mercy of the court. Since even a guilty plea will result in decades of prison time (prison!) you decide to plead not guilty, hoping maybe one juror will be naïve enough to hang the jury and result in a mistrial.

You attend your arraignment in an orange jumpsuit and shoes without laces. All eyes stare accusingly as you are led to the defendant's table. Of course bail is denied. There is never bail for someone who so obviously did what you did. Your home until the trial begins will be prison, not jail. You are separated from the general population of the convicted inmates until your trial, but every day you see them, and every moment of every day you dread the moment you will be forced to exist among them – very likely for the rest of your life.

When your trial date finally arrives, it goes as expected, as feared. The evidence presented by the prosecution is so compelling, so ironclad,

that not even the dimmest bulb on the jury could doubt your guilt. The trial having concluded, you await the verdict. News reaches you that the jury has reached a verdict, and under heavy guard you are led back into the courtroom to hear the bad news.

And the jury foreman reads the verdict: *“Not guilty.”*

You have trouble comprehending what you just heard. Yet when the jury is polled, the verdict is confirmed 12 times: *“Not guilty.”*

Suddenly you are free. Everything you lost is returned to you – your possessions, your freedom, your future. Not only are you freed physically, you are freed mentally. Gone forever is the anxiety, the stress and dread that you will one day be caught and punished. Never again can you be tried for your crimes.

If you think this was not you, think again. This was exactly you. Exactly me. There was absolutely no doubt of our guilt. There was absolutely no doubt about the sentence that would be imposed on us by an all-knowing and righteous Judge on that terrible Day of Judgment. Consciously or not, the dread of that final encounter had tormented us ceaselessly. We knew with terrible certainty that claiming to be “a good person” would never appease Divine Justice.

Our accuser would be God himself – the holy, omniscient Entity that knows all – since it was his laws we had broken. Our life had been a prison, a holding place for the unbelievers awaiting the end of their time of grace on earth. Yet every day, just on the other side of death, we saw those who had already left this world in unbelief, knowing that we would soon be among them.

Our trial was actually Jesus' trial, the closing argument of which was his crucifixion. For three days we waited for the verdict of the Righteous Judge, and on Easter morning it was handed down: *“Not guilty.”* The Judge's own sinless Son had volunteered to stand trial in our place, and God the Father, by raising his Son from the dead, has declared your debt of sin to be paid in full.

That is how we are to hear/read the opening verse of this evening's text: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*** Not as detached spectators of someone else's trial but as the accused, the guilty, in our own trial. You and I were the sinners who were *“rightly condemned.”*

Our text goes on to explain how, though *“rightly condemned,”* it was by no means a miscarriage of divine justice that you were nonetheless *“rightly pardoned”*: ***“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,* (Jesus’ flesh, not yours) *⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.”***

Understand what this means. Since Jesus was condemned in your place, you do not walk through this life as a guilty person who, through some miscarriage of justice, got away with something. The Judge does not shake his head in disgust every time he looks at you. In his eyes, through faith in what Jesus has done for you, you are sinless, pure, and holy in his sight. Every remnant of your guilt has been removed. As further proof, the Righteous God has even now adopted you as his own child. You now have this promise from your adopted Heavenly Father: ***If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*** You thus have God’s own promise that you will never walk among the general population of the damned in hell. He who raised Jesus will also raise you – he ***“will also give life to your mortal body.”***

This is the heart, the basis, of all thanksgiving. Without this pardon, nothing else matters. No amount of earthly treasure, no temporal blessing, no earthly joy or satisfaction matters. It’s only because we know what comes later that we can be filled with joy and thanksgiving also for what we have now.

Let this be the foundation of the gratitude that fills your heart every moment of every day that God gives you on this earth – all in the context of the pardon earned by Jesus our Savior. You and I no longer ***“live according to the flesh... For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh,”*** – they are preoccupied with the stuff this temporary life is made of. On the contrary, ***“those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.”*** Only when we remember that greatest Gift can we be truly thankful for, and content with, all of his lesser gifts. Thank God that, though once rightly condemned, you have now been rightly pardoned. Amen.

The Sermon Text:

ESV(Romans 8:1-11) *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

"Rightly Condemned, Rightly Pardoned"

The Offertory – [Sung by All] (On screens)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 563 (Stanzas 5-6)
"All Depends on Our Possessing"

The Thanksgiving Confession of Faith (Hymnal page 52 and On Screens)

The Thanksgiving Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 600
"All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night"

Silent Prayer



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

Thanksgiving 2025

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E Divide Ave

Bismarck, ND 58501 (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701)425-5483

www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson, President

Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

Thanksgiving Service – November 26, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 181

"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 (Hymnal page 79)

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 - 563 (Stanzas 1-2, 4)

"All Depends on Our Possessing"

