Thanksgiving – 2026

"The Value of Contentment"

Text: 1 Timothy 6:6-12, 17

Grace, mercy and peace – certainly three of God's greatest gifts to mankind – 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 First Letter to Timothy, the Sixth Chapter:

ESV **1 Timothy 6:6-12, 17** ***Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. 11 ¶ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 17 ¶ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.***

This is God's Word. These simple words 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 in the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Admittedly a rather abrupt, disquieting question, but what would you say to someone considering taking their own life? Maybe more to the point this evening, what would you, as a Christian, *not* say? Not one word that would encourage or justify so great a sin. Only law: *"Do not incur the wrath and condemnation of your God by committing such a Godless, faithless act of disobedience – especially not an act that ends your time of grace on earth. As great as your unhappiness is now, God has promised immeasurably worse for those who die in unbelief."*

What, on the other hand, is the typical go-to counsel of the godless in such circumstances? *"Don't do it. You have so much to live for."*

How, you are probably wondering, is this an appropriate beginning to any Thanksgiving message? To offer true thanksgiving to our God is to express our gratitude for the "done deals" of this life, and thereby to learn to truly trust him with our temporal and eternal futures going forward, even when things look very, very bleak. Obviously that is going to require some thought and explanation if we are truly to understand how this all works.

There are basically two different ways for each human being to live life – with optimism based on the good things of the past and the promises of our God, or with pessimism that the great life that we now enjoy might not continue. Our text describes the first frame of mind with these words: ***Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.*** Our text also describes the second frame of mind (the pessimistic, anxious outlook) with these words: ***But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.***

Our God doesn't leave it to our imagination which frame of mind he would have us adopt as our own. Our text goes on: ***"But as for you, O man of God, flee these things*** (the lust for wealth)***. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*** God has not called us to pessimism and anxiety but to optimism and contentment – and to a higher, deeper relationship with him.

The connection between these things is not always readily apparent. It takes some thought and work to connect things like optimism with contentment. This evening we will seek to make those connections – between optimism and contentment on the one hand, and pessimism

and lack of contentment on the other. This is an important study, since our quality of life (the quality of our time of grace here in time) usually hangs in the balance.

Every single person here this evening 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 we have already been received. A partial list would include your faith, your spouse, your children, parents, house, standard of living, creature comforts, innumerable luxuries, toys (for young and old) and the like. 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, clothes to wear, and a place to call home. Obviously this is but a tiny fraction of all that God has done for us, but you get the point.

Yet 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 His 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 with even more than we need? When has he ever let us down?"*

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 *"But what about…?"* – pointing to something that we "lack." Yet understanding 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 that would almost certainly have been very bad for you? What parent here hasn't done the same for your own children? 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 for which we asked, but which he knew would harm us. Having carried us safely to this point in our lives, all of these unseen and unknown blessings are also done deals; they 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.

In fact our God has blessed us so lavishly that one of our greatest issues today is guilt. Should I feel guilty that I've got it so good? Our text gives perfect guidance here: ***"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy."*** Our God obviously warns us neither to trust in temporal things nor to love them more than the God who gave them to us. Yet note the balance offered in our text. God gives us these things ***"to enjoy."*** There is no sin in enjoying with thanksgiving the blessings of our God. As Christians we know instinctively that there is such a thing as excess, but we often unnecessarily burden our consciences and complicate our lives when we fail simply to enjoy the blessings that our God has given us with ongoing thanksgiving.

Yet there is one component, one divine gift that is necessary if Christians are ***"to enjoy"*** the blessings of our God in a way that is pleasing to him: contentment. If you don't now have it, ask him for it. If you do possess it already, thank him for it. As it relates to the treasures of this earthly existence, it is his greatest gift.

Our text began with these words: ***"Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment."*** Like many other aspects of the Christian faith, those words seem oxymoronic. "Contentment" and "gain" seem mutually exclusive, so how can contentment represent "great gain"? Contentment is not only "gain" but "great gain" because without it you will *never* have enough. With it, you will *always* have enough. You've witnessed that in the world around you more often than you probably realize. Maybe also in yourself. A human being can possess more wealth than could be spent in a lifetime, but it will never be enough without the gift of contentment. On the other hand,

when Christians ***"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,"*** trusting the Lord's promise to also then provide all that is needed for life on earth – and are also then content with what the Lord provides – they will always have what the richest unbeliever will never have: enough.

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 really discussed the here and now. We haven't even begun to talk about the hereafter. Clearly the greatest "done deal" is Jesus Christ, and the forgiveness that he has won for every single human being. Nothing can ever change or undo what Jesus has done. So also our text describes him as ***"he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light."*** Nothing can make Jesus' death on the cross something less than total victory over sin and Satan and the full and complete payment for all of our sins. That is simply an accomplished fact in the eyes of God, and the doubt or denial of the unbelievers doesn't change these divine truths.

As important as contentment is in the physical realm, it is infinitely more valuable in the spiritual. Thank God for his gift of contentment in connection with material wealth, but recognize also his gift of contentment when it comes to the Christian faith. There too we need the gift of contentment, for we need constant reminder that in Christ Jesus we have absolutely everything we need. Faith alone in Jesus Christ is all that is necessary to exist as his child here on earth and to one day enter his heaven. We need nothing greater because there is nothing greater. Our works don't pay for or earn that gift, nor do our prayers or our thanksgiving. That is why Paul was able to say to the Christians in Corinth: ***For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*** [ESV](1 Corinthians 2:2) God grant each of us such priceless contentment. Amen.

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 563 (Stanzas 1-2, 4)
"All Depends on Our Possessing"

The Sermon Text:

ESV **1 Timothy 6:6-12, 17** ***Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, [7] for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. [8] But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. [9] But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. [11] ¶ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. [12] Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. [17] ¶ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.***

"The Value of Contentment"

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 2026

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Bismarck, ND 58501 (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701)425-5483
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Mick Johnson, President **Angela Pfennig, Organist**
Michael Roehl, Pastor

Thanksgiving Service – November 25, 2026

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 180 *(Stanzas 1-3)*
"All Praise to God Who Reigns Above"

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(Jonah 2:1-10) Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, 2 saying, "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. 3 For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. 4 Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.' 5 The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head 6 at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. 7 When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. 8 Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. 9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!" 10 And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

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 17:7-19)** "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? 8 Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? 9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" 11 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance 13 and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." 14 When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; 16 and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

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.