



**OH, GIVE THANKS!
THANKSGIVING EVE SERVICE**

Rev. Steven D. Spencer - Pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church
Deuteronomy 8:11-14, Philippians 4:6-20, Luke 17:11-19

Grace, peace and mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN!

**Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
and his love endures forever! Psalm 118:29**

**Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name! Psalm 100:4**

**Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name;
the upright shall dwell in your presence. Psalm 140:13**

**All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,
and all your saints shall bless you! Psalm 145:10**

**Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples,
proclaim that his name is exalted. Isaiah 12:4**

**Once Again: Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
and his love endures forever! Psalms 118:29**

We hardly need an act of Congress; much less a presidential mandate or even a national day of Thanksgiving to know it is right, very right to give thanks. It's all over the Psalms, and it's all over the Scriptures. To give thanks is what faith does. It's a byproduct of faith. In fact, you might even say that to be Christian is to be thankful. We are a "Eucharistic people." The word "Eucharist," refers to the Lord's Supper and its great thanksgiving, means to give thanks. It is truly good, right, and salutary; that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. It simply goes with faith. It's like the one faithful leper who returned to give thanks at the feet of Jesus.

Moses reminded the Israelites, "*Don't forget who you were, where you came from, how you got to this good land.*" "*And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.*" Moses warned them, "Take care, lest in that day you forget. Lest you forget that you were once slaves. Lest you forget that the Lord brought you out of Egypt. Lest you forget that He led you through the wilderness. Lest you forget that the land was inherited by mercy not by merit. "Beware, lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth. You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth.'"

Thanksgiving is remembering. Remembering the Giver of the gifts we enjoy. It's not simply a matter of "counting one's blessings." Thanksgiving is not an inventory but an acknowledgment of the Giver. Remembering that all we have comes from God's hand, through means, certainly, but from God. Because God works through means our thanksgiving stops one step short, like the 9 out of ten lepers who were very thankful to God for their healing, but didn't return to give thanks to Jesus.

We thank the farmer, the butcher, the baker, and the others who serve us, and it's good and right for us to do so. Everyone likes to hear a word of thanks. But working in, with, and under them is God, who in His

fatherly goodness and mercy provides and protects His good creation. And because God is hidden behind these “masks,” as Luther called them, we forget to give thanks to the God from whom all blessing flow.

We forget to give thanks to God also when we are anxious, worried, or in distress. Our focus is so centered on what we don't have, whatever is causing us anxiety, that we forget what we do have. This is especially true of 2nd and 3rd article gifts - the gifts of Christ, of our Baptism into Christ, of our new birth in Him, the words of forgiveness spoken to us in His name, the Body and Blood that strengthen and preserve us. Jesus warned His disciples that the cares and concerns of this life can choke out the Word, like weeds choking out good seed. He told them, “Don't be anxious for the things of this life, what you will eat or wear, for your Father in heaven knows your needs, and He who cares for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field will certainly care for you, His children.

The apostle Paul, writing to the Philippians from prison, said, “***Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. With thanksgiving.***” Notice this. No matter what your circumstances, no matter what the cause of your anxiety, no matter why you are praying, give thanks. Give thanks not as a transaction, for what you hope to receive (“Thank you in advance for your cooperation.”) but give thanks for what brought you to prayer in the first place. Remember, Paul is writing from prison. He's lost his liberty. The Philippians sent him a generous gift. He's writing a thank you letter.

He goes on to say that he really didn't need anything, “***for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound, in any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.***” What's his secret? Listen carefully here it is: “***I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.***” All things through Christ who gives me strength. This is how Paul can give thanks in any and all circumstances. He does so through Jesus Christ, who even though He had no place to lay His head, nonetheless trusted His Father and lived the perfect life of thanksgiving on behalf of all of us.

We're reminded also that there is no 1st article thanksgiving without a 2nd and 3rd article. Our restless hearts are content only in Christ, and only in Christ does thanksgiving flow to God. The one out of ten lepers who believed, who was faithful, returned to the feet of Jesus to give thanks and praise to God. He might have argued that since God was everywhere, and he was headed to the temple anyway, why bother to go back. But faith drives him to the feet of Jesus. And it's from Jesus that he alone hears, “***Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well.***” The others were made well too, but this one was saved in the fullest sense of that word. Not simply cleansed from leprosy, but cleansed from the leprosy of sin and rescued from death by Jesus.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord. It's good for us to be here this evening, resting as it were at the feet of Jesus, to give thanks for everything we have - the bounties of this land, the freedoms we enjoy, the food on our tables, the clothing on our backs, the roof over our heads. All are gifts from our good and gracious Father, “for all which it is our duty as priests to God to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.” It's our priestly duty and privilege to give thanks, not only for ourselves, but also for our neighbors, and for this good land of ours. Thanksgiving is what we do.

So whether the nation Israel which is about to take possession of the Promised Land, or St. Paul in prison, or the one leper who turned on the road and returned to Jesus, or you a recipient of God's rich grace in Jesus, give thanks to the Lord for He is good and His steadfast love endures forever. And you too shall endure forever in Christ Jesus; you have His (✠) Word on it! So give thanks. In Jesus name, amen and amen!

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN