

Harvest Observance/Day of Thanksgiving (Observed): November 16, 2022
“The Greatest Possession”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thanksgiving marks a season of great gathering. There is much food that is shared, along with memories and laughter. We mark this time by stopping and giving thanks to God. But for what? Often for possessions we have, sometime for possessions we had at one time, sometime for things we may have had contact with, but never really possessed in our modern sense of the term, like family and friends.

“A man’s life does not consist in what he possesses,” says the Lord. A man’s life consists in being possessed. The envious farmer got caught in his own envy. He sought to be self-sufficient, to fill up his glass, to steel himself against the future. This should cause us to give pause. Self-sufficiency is a false, mis-leading dream. You cannot hedge your bets. You cannot avoid the reality of this fallen life. And you cannot go it alone. Wealth will not stop terrorists, hurricanes, or stock market crashes. It is the things you depend upon other than God, that God, in His mercy, takes away.

This thanksgiving, may you see that you are God’s possession. You belong to Him. A man’s life consists in being possessed, but for that to happen he must give up his possessions. You cannot be possessed while possessing. Those who would be saved must cut their ties with the world. They must die. Because God does not share. You can have only one master. You belong to that which you love, and you are a slave to anything from which you will not walk away. Better to be a slave keeping the door of the Lord than deluded in the tents of wickedness.

This can be a hard thing, and our sinful nature likes to rebel against this grace of God. Instead of living as His possessed children, we sadly spend our thanksgivings sharing something else. Many may not even be aware of it, unless you are on the wrong end of it – Gossip. For all the things we gather to share, why does this one become such an easy thing to share? We possess something that seemingly would make one feel better about themselves by putting another one down, and who doesn’t want to share in that possession?

This is often countered with the emphatic question, “But who is to judge?” Good question. Possessing this knowledge as God’s own possession, let’s think about this for bit. Do we not confess that Our Lord Jesus Christ shall come to judge the living and the dead? Then what are we to make of these words in our Gospel lesson, **“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?”¹**

Isn’t the man being wise? He is looking for a bit of knowledge that would put him ahead of another, right? Isn’t this what Dave Ramsey or the Lutheran Church Extension Fund would advise? Pay off debt and save up for a rainy day. What was he supposed to do with his abundance?

The man from the crowd was only asking for justice. He wasn’t asking for Jesus to give him something for nothing or even for Jesus to make his brother be generous. He was only asking for the inheritance to be divided fairly.

Imagine a man who leaves behind two heirs, brothers, without a will. The older brother is a clever lawyer and snags for himself the family farm and cottage along with all the furniture and possessions. The younger brother simply wants to obtain a clock his grandfather built and a boat that he and his father had restored together.

Would you call such a man covetous? Would you warn him that life does not consist of things or an abundance of possessions, and that he should walk away and let his brother keep all the stuff while he suffers without?

Jesus does. Because the man wants Jesus to serve as his brother’s judge. We already have Moses. We have the Law. If you want to stand up against that standard, you’re going to be destroyed. And you can’t just point the Law of Moses at others. Ask the pharisees. It always catches the pointers.

When our mothers taught us that when we point our finger at someone else there are always three pointing back at ourselves, they were more clever than they knew. The things that most irritate you in others, that which keeps you fuming and awake at night about your brother or your mother or your co-worker, is almost always that which you dislike the most in yourself. The man who cries to Jesus for justice,

¹ Luke 12:13–14

furious over his brother's greed, is himself obsessed with stuff. His grandfather is not in the clock. His father is not in the boat. It is only stuff. Stuff that rusts and decays, that is left behind when we die, stuff that cannot keep you safe or satisfy the Law's demands. The man did not cry out to Jesus that He would give Him something for nothing, but for justice. He should have cried out for something for nothing.

We are prone to forget many things in our lives, and so we try to hold things over others. We use slogans like, "Never forget." We use this perceived power over others to get them to do what we want, "I've never forgotten what you did," we say to each other. We gossip to others in attempts to keep the never forgetting never forgotten. We forget how our forefathers and ancestors suffered in the ravages of war. We forget how easily it is for a terrorist to slip into places unnoticed and ruin thousands of lives. What we fail to see is how we slip into our own gatherings unnoticed and by our own words possibly ruin another's life and reputation.

The point is, we are not safe or secure, no matter how wise we think ourselves to be, no matter how much is in the bank or how clever we are or how frugal and careful. You can plant and tend only to have others sow. Injustice and violence and death all threaten because we are sinners and we dwell among sinners and this world is corrupt and dying with sin.

The man did not ask Jesus to give him something for nothing; He asked Jesus for justice. He should have cried out for something for nothing. Jesus did not come to be a judge, a new Moses, to make men behave. But if that is what you want, then that is what you get. Ask for justice and you will be judged by the stark and unbending standard of the Law. Do you really want what justice demands? The wages of sin is death. Have you ever harbored any anger or lust or greed in your heart? Are you a stranger to envy, lying, and gossip? Of course not. We are weak with passion and covetousness and selfishness.

The Law demands we be damned because of our sin. Yet Our Father has not appointed Jesus as our judge. Do not make Him so by demand or our souls, our lives, will be required of us. The Law accuses and kills. We do not possess it, it would rather possess us.

But it does not possess you, you are God's possession. Jesus was appointed by Our Father as Messiah, Savior, Redeemer. He comes not to judge but to reconcile, to lay down His life as a ransom, and to take it up again for your justification. It is not just or fair or even right. It is grace, mercy, love. It was unjust of Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. It is unjust for you to trespass into places God has not willed for you to go, driving for power over others by seeking to possess others for your own good.

But it was even more unjust, indeed, the greatest of all injustices, that the Son of God should die for you and for all evil men, that He should bear the burden and feel the devil's filthy fangs tear into His flesh, be reviled and mocked by men for whom He loved and for whom He died; but He was.

It is nearly as great an injustice that you should receive the credit for His good work, His perfect faith, His willful and loving obedience. But you do. And this pleases God and fills the holy angels with songs of praise. The innocent Man with the pure heart is condemned. Barabbas the guilty, you the guilty, go free. It is unjust that the Father should bear no grudge, but He doesn't. He welcomes you with open arms. It is unjust that the Son Himself should choose you for His bride, but He does.

Here is the inheritance He has come to bring: His own. The man from the crowd wanted trinkets from his brother. It might have been the equivalent of a million dollars or a crown to rule a kingdom or valuable mementos of his father. It matters not. It was trinkets, passing, fading stuff, and nothing more. Jesus was present to give more, to give Himself, to make that man, and all men who believe in Him, heirs of eternal life, heirs of the Father, beloved of the Son, the righteous of Israel by grace.

For the many things we give thanks this year, we first give thanks that He has possessed us. You belong to Him. He has made me and all creatures; He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

He has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.