

Day of Thanksgiving (Observed): November 14, 2018

“Thanks Be To God”

Grace, Mercy and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. As we observe a Day of Thanksgiving, we focus our attention on the words of Deuteronomy. As God wills ALL to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, we hear again, *“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. 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. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him.”*¹

It seems like every year, when I get to Thanksgiving, I hear the same conversations, “Pastor, this was a tough year. Things will get better. Next year will be better. I guess there are still things for which I am thankful.” The schools do a relatively good job of making the kids come up with a list of things for which they are thankful, and our society generally understands we have many things for which to give thanks. Many will give thanks, but only to a nebulous of generality. It reminds me of a child opening a birthday gift, and when prompted to say, “Thank you,” they will quickly and blankly look around the room with a flat, “Thank you;” which is directed at anyone who is in earshot, I guess.

Our Heavenly Father gives many good and gracious gifts to all, even the unbelievers. He continually opens His hand to His creatures great and small. He also sends testing and suffering for your sake to humble you, and so that you know what is in your heart; will you keep His commandments or not.

Take a few moments to write down a few things for which you are thankful (*take time to write down a few of my own*)

¹ Deuteronomy 8:2-6

For what are you thankful today? Family? Friends? Food? A warm home? The possibility of the Vikings solidifying their spot on top of the NFC North? How does it compare to the list in the Small Catechism? Food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

Every day is a gift from God and is a reason for thanks enough. It is on top of the gift of life that God bestows all earthly and heavenly blessings. The Christian does well when waking every morning, to make the sign of the cross as a remembrance of their baptism, say the 10 Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, read God's Holy Word and feed their soul as well as their body. The Christian also does well to repeat this in the evening; make the sign of the cross recalling forgiveness is given by only one death, repeating God's Holy Law in the 10 Commandments, confessing the merciful and gracious Trinity who created, redeems, and sanctifies, and praying the prayer which lays all things at His feet.

By not skipping these meals for the soul, the Christian rests well in the peace of God which passes all human understanding. With faith, you pray, ***“I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”***²

Learn from Deuteronomy 8. Israel had been delivered from slavery in Egypt. They had seen God's mighty hand work against Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. They had been miraculously tended, nurtured, and sustained by God for 40 years in the wilderness. As Israel gets ready to settle in the Promised Land, they would be in danger of falling into pride and forgetfulness of God when they are enjoying the abundant produce of the land. When they are no longer fed by heavenly manna, and water from the rock, and instead are relying on God's good creation in a fertile and good land, when they are dwellers and not wanderers, will they forget God's gracious hand? Will they continue to see that daily bread comes from God? Will

² Psalm 118:21–24

they recognize that God causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust, and continue to receive their daily bread with thanksgiving?

The Holy Spirit through the mouth of Moses seeks to guard them against the danger of forgetting God by calling to mind their history. God does not change. That is one of His most endearing qualities. We can read through the Scriptures and see exactly how God still loves, cares, preserves, guards and protects His people.

Israel is first reminded to “***Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.***”³ God humbled them as a way to prove their attitude towards God. He uses means of distress, hardship, adversity, and misery so that people, His people, would feel, know and confess their need for help and dependence solely on Him.

Now to be sure, God already knew what was in their hearts, and so He sends this testing of their faith for their sakes. Their struggles are designed by God for His people to recognize their position and their reliance on God. He uses this testing as discipline. As Hebrews fills in, “***It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.***”⁴

Deuteronomy 8 expressively states that God sent these sufferings and hardships so that He, “***might humble you, testing you to know what was in your hearts, whether you would keep His commandments or not.***”⁵ It is in these testing’s of faith, God placed His people in such positions in their life as would drive them to reveal what was in their heart. Just like Adam and Eve at the tree, Cain alone with Abel in the field, and Lot’s wife fleeing Gomorrah, would Israel believe in the omnipotence, the immutability, the omniscience, the love and the righteousness of God or not?

³ 1 Peter 5:6–8

⁴ Hebrews 12:7–8

⁵ Deuteronomy 8:2

You all know that Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 to Satan when the devil tempts Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus confesses the same words spoken through the Old Testament, “***Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.***”⁶ The importance of this statement by Jesus boldly confesses a truth central to our Day of Thanksgiving. Jesus, as do all Christians, leave it to God to care for the sustenance of life. We leave all things to God’s direction. We place our trust in Him and cling to Him alone as the giver and sustainer of all good and perfect gifts. We recognize that “***Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.***”⁷

So what do we do? We give thanks and we pray. We pray for all that they would be humbled under God’s mighty hand. We encourage and help them to receive their daily bread with thanksgiving. God wishes to show us how He cares for us in all our need and faithfully provides for us. “*He abundantly grants and preserves these things, even for the wicked. Yet, He wishes that we pray for these goods in order that we may recognize that we receive them from His hand and may feel His fatherly goodness toward us in them.*”⁸

For what are you thankful? Before you make the list, don’t just look around the room blankly. We have revealed for us the very One who gives all perfect gifts: The Triune God.

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.

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

⁶ Deuteronomy 8:3

⁷ James 1:17

⁸ Large Catechism, The Fourth Petition, p. 82-83

may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

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

For all of this and more, thanks be to God! Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we thank You for our daily bread. Guard us against greed and anxiety about the body and earthly things that we may confidently rely on You for all blessings. Strengthen us in times of testing, and cause us to look to Your Son, the Author and Protector of our faith; in His Name we pray. Amen.

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