

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Thanksgiving, November 23, 2023

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 568, 27:1-2, 574, offertory: 39:1-2, Offering Hymn 567, 570, 36.
Lessons Ps. 145, 1 Tim. 2:1-8, Lk. 17:11-19.
Sermon Text: Psalm 145:15-16.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Thanksgiving Day is upon us. After we eat that great meal, we can plan how to shop on Black Friday! Or maybe even go shopping today! That's after we take our naps and maybe watch some football in our nice cozy living rooms!

So how is your Thanksgiving shaping up? Well, if you are here, you are making a sincere effort to put God first in your life.

Just before God ended the life of Joshua, he reviewed all the great things God had done for his chosen people. He then said to them: *"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."* (Joshua 24:14-15)

So in a way they had a choice. You, like God's Old Testament chosen ones, have chosen this day to serve the Lord. May that continue each day throughout your life, as you continue to praise God.

God's Word tells us that

THE LORD GOD PROVIDES ALL THINGS FOR ALL CREATURES

- 1. God is certainly deserving of praise.**
- 2. Every living creature is dependent on him for life and sustenance.**
- 3. Let us serve HIM!**

Our text, which is a familiar table prayer from Luther's Small Catechism, is right in the middle of this Psalm. The emphasis of this Psalm is on praising God's love and his willingness to provide for his whole creation.

The Psalm begins: *"A psalm of praise. Of David. I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom."*

King David has nothing but praise for the Lord God, whom this great king of Israel calls *"my God the King."* He then tells us how it is that he learned of the greatness and goodness of the Lord God. *"One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness."*

Many of you first learned of the goodness of God from your parents. It is likely that they taught you your first prayers; they brought you to church, and perhaps Sunday School. They saw to it that you learned of the Lord God, of his commandments, and of what great things he has done for you, especially emphasizing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

These verses are also reminding us of a great responsibility. We are to teach our children the Word and will of God. How sad it is especially when parents, whom you KNOW have learned the Word of God in Sunday School, Catechism Instruction, and perhaps even Christian Day School do not teach their children what they have learned from God's Word.

Listen to what the Lord has done! ***“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.”***

This speaks of the great love and mercy of God, an idea found repeatedly in the Bible.

How has God shown his graciousness to you? The very most important way is through Jesus Christ. Though we were sinners, God sent his only-begotten Son into the World to die for our sins after he lived a perfect life. Paul writes about this in this way: ***“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** (Romans 5:8)

He doesn't just have some compassion. He is ***“full of compassion.”*** He has ***“great mercy.”*** He cares for us and loves us. His ***“tender mercies”*** extend ***“over all his works.”***

We read that ***“All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you.”*** Here is that use of the word “saints” referring to all believers. ***“Thy saints shall bless thee.”*** We – together with all who believe – will praise and glorify God. All who believe are holy. They are “saints” because God imputes the perfection of Jesus Christ to them and to us. We will praise God, ***“extol”*** him, ***“bless”*** him. We won't do it just today, but every day and every night. We will do it in our prayers, private and public. We will continue to praise God in our actions and our words, and especially in our thoughts, to help crowd out sinful thoughts, words, and deeds.

Here again is a reminder of the purpose of believers: Not only will they tell their children and grandchildren of the Lord, but ***“They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.”*** God ***“wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth”*** (1 Timothy 2:4) and it is our calling to help tell them.

There are some of the wonders of the Lord which all mankind can see naturally. These involve the Lord's power and might; what are called “acts of nature” as unbelieving mankind might call them. Everyone can see the mighty acts and the glorious splendor of God in nature. This can be seen in hurricanes, tornadoes and earthquakes. But they can also be seen daily, for example, from a sunrise to a sunset to the marvels of the night-time sky. But it is only through the Word of God – the Gospel of Jesus Christ – and is there any other “gospel”? – that anyone can learn of God's great love in sending a Redeemer for all the sins of all mankind. That knowledge comes only from the Word of God, the Bible.

God's kingdom ***“is an ever-lasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.”***

When we sin – and that happens daily and much – ***“The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.”*** And which of us has not been ***“bowed down”***, depressed, or has fallen into sin because of our innate sinful human nature and this wicked world? Of God's believing children, we remember that Scripture tells us ***“we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”*** (Acts 14:22)

Then come those words that many of us learned as a table prayer: ***“The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”*** (KJV)

God is supplying all creatures with food as they are in need of it. When God opens his hand, it is like the true horn of plenty, the cornucopia overflowing with good things. When God satisfies the desire of every living thing, we see his bounty supplying in rich measure what they actually need for their daily lives. To these acts of God's providential care he adds those of his governing and ruling all things.

This verse is one of those places where I personally prefer the King James Version to the New International Version. It is certainly true and accurate that ***“The eyes of all wait upon Thee,”*** looking to the Lord for their sustenance. It may not be true – and certainly isn't, when we look around us, even at our acquaintances and “friends” that ALL the eyes of everyone, ***“The eyes of all look to”*** the Lord. Isn't it much more common to hear of how people have accomplished all that has happened to them and they are responsible and should get all the credit for all the material possessions they have? Haven't you seen and heard of the attitude, if not the question itself: “Why should I give thanks? I've done and acquired all that I have, and after all, I have deserved it.”

Surely for the Christian, we ***“look to”*** God for everything. But not everyone looks to God for blessings like you do, oh dear child of God! But surely Jesus' question in our Gospel lesson, after healing ten men of leprosy applies: ***“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”*** (Luke 11:17-18) Are not all fed, and clothed, and cared for in this world by the Lord God? But where are the rest as we give thanks Sunday after Sunday?

What about those who complain and lament that the Lord God is not good to them? Scripture makes it clear that ***“The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made. The LORD is near to all who call***

on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.” We dare not fault the Lord for anything we supposedly lack. God is righteous and perfect in all he does.

We may feel that we haven’t been blessed as much as some others. We may feel twinges of jealousy over what others have and we have not. But the Lord gives what he wants us to have. Sure, our own sinful flesh sometimes is responsible for some of what we don’t have, but the Lord God provides what we need. Listen to Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:25-34: *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

“The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.” How close is God? He is right next to you when you pray. He is with you when you are in danger. Remember he is omnipresent, always with you. You can have confidence, that no matter how alone you might feel, the Lord God is there. Talk to him in prayer. Listen to him in his Word, the Bible. Read the Scriptures. Search the Scriptures, not only for the eternal life that you know is there, but for words of comfort and encouragement in your daily life. *“He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.”* His eternal salvation is his greatest gift.

“The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.” There you have words of hope and encouragement for every day. The Lord loves you, and will lead you not just into a physical land flowing with milk and honey, but into an eternal life in heaven. *“But all the wicked he will destroy.”* Eternal damnation in hell is the end – really, an unending time of torment and suffering – for all the wicked who do not turn from their wicked ways and turn to the Lord God in faith.

So we can joyfully say *“My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.”* That’s what we want – to praise the Lord – today and forever. And we want every human, every creature to *“praise his holy name for ever and ever.”*

Today again you have a choice: *“But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”* (Joshua 24:15) You are gathered here to serve the Lord today. May you serve him not only today, but tomorrow, too, so that you may serve him forever. Amen.

Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for November 28, 2013.