

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Thanksgiving, November 28, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 44, 395:1, 36, 568, 567.

Lessons: Psalm 85, Philippians 4:4-9, Luke 17:11-19.

Sermon Text: James 1:16-17.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Look around you at this place of worship. Where did all this come from? Some of you can say, well, I helped to build this place of worship. I helped furnish this place of worship. I help maintain it.

Look around your home. Where did all that come from? Isn't it easy to say, well, I earned the money to pay for what I have. I am responsible for all I have.

Where and how did you get all that you have? Have you maybe built it yourself? Have you put sweat equity into it to make it yours?

Or maybe you inherited it? Did you inherit it directly or maybe inherited something or some money to help you buy it?

Has it simply been your hard work that has let you acquire all you have? Has it been what some people might call "luck" or "good fortune", or "being in the right place at the right time", or "knowing the right people"? And about your job. Are you the person who is really responsible for everything you did that is listed on your resume? Are you responsible for finding someone who could give you a good job? Is everything totally your work?

Well, you know that you have many abilities and many possessions.

But all those things are gifts – yes, things that have been given to you. James tells us in the Word of God about those gifts.

GOOD GIFTS – PERFECT GIFTS – COME FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS

- 1. How did you get all that you have and are?**
- 2. Why did you receive it?**

I know that many of you are now thinking about "gifts" because the time of celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ has become a gift-giving time. And the real reason for gifts at this time of year is to remind us of God's greatest gift to mankind: The Savior from all our sins.

The Word of God tells us ***"Don't be deceived, my dear brothers."*** Don't think you are responsible for everything you have. They are gifts. You didn't earn them.

When we look at things – possessions – in our houses and garages and sheds and storage places we can easily remember when we acquired some of those things. We can easily think of all the work we have put in to earn the money to buy those things. We can easily think of how nice some of those things are and how much hard work of ours it took to acquire those things.

But where did they really come from? Who really provided them for us?

How many people aren't like the man who didn't even have enough room to store the possessions he had acquired? Jesus told this parable: ***"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself,***

“You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” ’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:16–21, NIV84)

My point today is that the rich man was not responsible for everything he had. The ground of this rich man produced the crop. Oh, yes, he may have worked it and fertilized it and even had many people working for him who actually did the physical work. But he was not personally responsible for the possessions that had been given to him by God. And that would be all of his possessions!

Did you notice how self-centered he was? He used the word “I”. He used the word “my” and is concerned for “myself”.

Can you see his attitude? He felt he was totally responsible for all he had acquired. He had deceived himself. He was not the one responsible for the good crops growing on the land he regarded as his own. And he didn’t realize, as many people do, that he was simply a caretaker, a steward responsible for taking care of the land he was using.

There have been people in the world who simply recognize – as a tribe, as a people, as individuals – that they are simply caretakers of the land they are living on and don’t really “own” it. We have read that native American peoples just didn’t understand that the white settlers could “buy” and could “own” the land when they signed treaties, even here in Southern Minnesota. They just didn’t understand that they were ‘giving up’ the land and could no longer use it as they had when they were taking care of it and living on it.

The rich man in Jesus’ parable had the attitude that he was responsible for acquiring, for ‘owning’ all he had acquired.

What is your attitude? Well, the attitude of the follower of Jesus Christ, the disciple of Jesus Christ, the believer in Jesus Christ is a far different attitude than children of the world.

The Word of God in front of us today makes it clear that ***“Every good and perfect gift is from above.”*** “Above”? Well, scripture promptly tells us what “above” means.

Everything we have has been given to us. And it came from, and continues to come from “above”, and James makes it clear exactly what that means. ***“Coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.”*** James doesn’t only tell us that everything that is good and everything that is perfect is a gift, he makes it abundantly clear exactly where it comes from.

And who is that Father of the heavenly lights?

Listen to the Bible. ***“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.”*** (Genesis 1:1–5, NIV84)

And God did more than just create light. He did some very specific things with “light”. He had some very specific purposes for the light he created.

“And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.’ And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good.” (Genesis 1:14–18, NIV84)

The heavenly lights all had specific purposes. The brightest light was to lighten the day. The lesser light was to rule the night. The lights were to be ***“signs to mark seasons and days and years.”*** The location of the sun in the sky, and where and when it rises and sets determines seasons. What we call “phases of the moon” determine seasons repeated over a period of about 28 days.

My feeble human mind has no explanation for the ideas being presented by men as they are exploring the skies, sending rockets and satellites and even men outside of the bounds of the earth. My simple human mind has no explanation for what men are calling millions of “light years” and determining distances by the distance light

travels, which travels at 186,000 miles per second. And a light year is the distance light can travel in one year, which is more than 31,000,000 seconds. Even one light year is incomprehensible to me, and my hand-held electronic calculator flashes an error message when I try to multiply those two numbers. But God put the sun and the moon and the stars in the heavens for his purposes simply explained in the creation history.

But what I can understand is that the sun and the moon and the stars have certain positions in the sky at certain times of the year and the month. The moon changes regularly about every 28 days from totally bright to totally dark. And someone commented that the moon is darkened at the time that is called “new moon” for 3 days, which is the time Jesus Christ was in the grave.

When it comes to all we have, remember that it is all gifts from God. Don’t boast about your gifts or your wealth! It comes from God. Listen to the Word of God from the book of Jeremiah: **“This is what the Lord says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord.”** (Jeremiah 9:23–24, NIV84)

Gifts. And a gift is something that has been given to you. You haven’t earned it. You haven’t exchanged something for it, you haven’t bought it. It has been handed over to you. And all you have comes from God!

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:5–7, NIV84)

Jesus is the light of world.

I hope that you can think of God, the Father of the heavenly lights when you see all the lights at this Christmas season. You will probably be having extra lights in your homes. You will see many Christmas lights in many places We have been told that there are over 2,000,000 lights in Mankato’s Sibley Park, called “Kiwanis Holiday Lights”. I hope that you can think of Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world when you see lights this Advent and Christmas season.

John ‘s Gospel tells us this about Jesus Christ, who was sent to earth to obey God’s laws perfectly in our place, and to be punished on the cross for all the sins of all mankind: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”** (John 1:1–9, NIV84)

Jesus Christ is that light of the world. And he has overcome, defeated, beaten Satan, the prince of darkness. He did this for you, and continues to give you every good and perfect gift!

Remember that when you think of all the gifts that God has given to you personally, and to you as a sinful human being.

And don’t forget the greatest gift ever. It is the forgiveness of sins, so that you may have eternal life simply by believing in Jesus Christ. Amen.