

“Beyond ‘Being Thankful’”  
Psalm 145:15-16

November 28, 2013

Thanksgiving Day

Being grateful is cool these days. Being thankful is the in thing to do. I’m not sure when it started, but I begin to notice interviews with football players on Thanksgiving Day in which some said, “I’m grateful for...” and others would say, “I’m thankful for...” The lists of what they were grateful for and what they were thankful for were all very similar: country, freedom, our armed forces, family, friends, food, drink, homes, etc. But one thing most people (outside of someone like Tim Tebow) often failed to mention was: to WHOM they were grateful and to WHOM they were thankful.

You might think I’m being a bit picky here, but I don’t think I am. “Giving thanks” requires an object just like “loving” requires an object. Imagine if, on Valentine’s Day, people said they were “being loving” on that day. That would sound silly. Instead, people talk very specifically about whom they love: their parents, their spouses, their children, and so on.

Granted, sometimes people in these interviews *do* mention to whom they are thankful. It might be their spouse, their parents, their employer, or so on. Sometimes, it might be implied that they are really thankful to themselves for all the hard work they did in order to get all the stuff for which they are thankful. Most of the time, though, I don’t think people really think through their gratitude and thankfulness. They end up being thankful in a very vague and generic way to no one or nothing in particular.

There is One who is quite worthy and deserving of our thanks. He is the Lord who made all the stuff for which we say we are thankful. He is worthy of thanks because He made it all. He is deserving of thanks because He has given it all to us. The problem is that people either do not know the Lord or, in acknowledging His existence, do not really believe that He will provide or has provided for their wants and needs.

This all goes back to our first parents, Adam and Eve. The Lord made everything in heaven and earth and freely gave it all to Adam and Eve to enjoy. However, when tempted by the serpent,

they did not believe that the Lord had given them *everything* they really needed. They figured that it was now up to them to provide for themselves that which would make them happy. So, they gave in to Satan's temptation and sinned by eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Instead of acknowledging that the Lord had given them all that they had, being thankful to the Lord for what He had given, and trusting the Lord for what they would need, Adam and Eve disbelieved the Lord and sought to get more their own way, thinking it was up to them to do so.

Today, people have the same problem. Sin has separated us from the Lord. That separation causes us not to trust in Him to provide for us. We do not naturally acknowledge that it is the Lord who has given us everything we have. We may say it, but, deep down inside, we don't really believe that. We like to take credit for what we have because we have worked hard for it. We may take time on a designated day like today to be "thankful" or "grateful" in some sort of vague generic way, but that's about it. Then it's back to wondering how we are going to get everything we will need or want in the future, fearful that we won't be able to make it.

But things are different for you who have gathered in God's House today on a Thursday morning. It's not that you are better or any less sinfully selfish than those who are generically grateful today. It's not that you have more stuff and a better reason to give thanks than those who are thankful in general today. It's that you have a different status with God than many others have.

Like everyone else, you have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. Your sins, along with theirs, have been paid for. As the Scriptures say, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ." (2 Cor. 5:19). Through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, God made peace with His enemies – us – and made us His friends, indeed, His very children. A loving father always takes care of his children. God is our perfectly loving Heavenly Father.

What you have that many others don't have is the faith to know and believe that all of this is so. According to Ephesians 2:8-9, God not only saved you by grace, but He gave you the free gift of faith to believe and receive all of His promises. By being baptized into Christ to come to faith and by hearing the Word of God to be strengthened in faith, your life situation may not have changed but

your perspective on your life situation has changed. In terms of having your needs and wants met, you see things differently.

Many of you know our dog, Scooby. He is an excellent example of what I am talking about. (Your pets probably are, too.) When Scooby is hungry, I never see him pace back and forth, worrying about where he is going to get food. Nor do I see him trying to get his own food. He will come up to Matt, Becky, or me and just look at us. He doesn't seem nervous or afraid. There is no doubt in him. He is confident to the point of being annoying. He expects to be fed. And do you know why expects that? Because he knows he will be fed. And he is.

That is what we, as Christians, are allowed to do with our Heavenly Father regarding food and all of our other needs. We don't have to pace back and forth, worrying about whether we will be taken care of. We don't have to try and meet our own needs. As our text for today says, "The eyes of all look to you." We look to our Heavenly Father, not nervously or fearfully, but in faith with confidence, expecting Him to take care of us. Our text says this is what we can expect, "you give them their food in due season." God will give us what we need at the proper time.

What about the next part? "You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing." As Christians, we can ask for all that we desire and can expect to receive that. Why? Because, as Christians, our desires have been changed. We pray every Sunday in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done." Our will is constantly and continually being conformed to His will. Do you desire to have faith and be saved? God desires that for you and has already given that to you in your baptism. Do you desire to know the will of God? God desires that, too, and gives you His Holy Word for you to learn His will. Do you desire to have a stronger faith and closer connection to your Lord? He desires that for you, too, and gives you the Lord's Supper to strengthen your faith and draw you ever closer to Him by receiving the very body and blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. Do you desire to not die, but live forever? God desires that, too. After Jesus died on the cross to forgive you all your sins, God made Jesus alive so that you might live forever and never die again. God will satisfy the desires of your new heart in Christ.

As Christians, we can celebrate Thanksgiving in a very joyful and very specific way. We look to God in faith and with expectation for all good things. He gives us what we need “in due season”. He opens His hand and satisfies our desires. When we have our needs met and our desires satisfied, we know and acknowledge from whom they came. From that, thanksgiving naturally flows on a daily basis. We are not “thankful” in a generic way. We are thankful, very specifically, to God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. We are not “grateful” in general. We are grateful, very specifically, for each and every blessing of body and soul, knowing we have received each of them from the love of God and by the will of God.

As many of you know, Luther used our text for today as part of a blessing he wrote at meal time. Although the prayer is specifically written for the food on the table, it is a good prayer for acknowledging and giving thanks for any and all gifts which the Lord has given to us. As you consider today and every day all the blessings of God which have met your needs or satisfied your desires, will you pray Luther’s prayer with me? *The eyes of all look to You,[O Lord,] and You give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these Your gifts which we receive from Your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*