

“Only Thanks”
Matthew 6:25-34

November 25,2010

Thanksgiving Day

The intriguing thing about Thanksgiving Day is not what we do on this day. Even people who are not Christian or even religious know what today is for: giving thanks. Christians give thanks to God for what we call “blessings”. Non-Christians talk about “being grateful” for their possessions, although they don’t usually specify to whom or what they are grateful. No, the really intriguing thing to consider this day is what we do on the other 364 days of the year to prepare for this day.

For many non-Christians (and, sadly, some Christians), the idea is that, for the rest of the year, we must work hard to gain and maintain the possessions we have so we can be thankful next year at this time. Nothing comes free to us in life so we must be diligent in our efforts to preserve the life style to which we have become accustomed and, perhaps (if we work especially hard) to improve our life style. Then we can be grateful again on this day next year.

For many sincere Christians, the idea is that, for the rest of the year, we continue to be diligent in prayer. We come to God, asking Him for the things we want and need, and God gives us these things. Some Christians will attribute this to the “power of prayer”, the sincerity of their prayers, or even the frequency of their prayers. Of course, we intersperse prayers of thanksgiving in with the petitions for blessings, maybe even trying to balance them so it doesn’t look like we are too greedy. But we continue to ask so that we can be thankful to God again on this day next year.

The truth of the matter is, however, that nobody, Christian or non-Christian, deserves the things they have. All people stand guilty before God as sinners, both in their very natures and because of their actions. We deserve only His wrath and punishment. Whether we call them possessions or blessings, none of them come about because of our efforts.

We do not get them because we work hard for them as the American dream promises. Jesus says in our text, “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..... See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.... God clothes the grass of the field.”

We do not get them because we are Christians and have prayed hard for them as many in Evangelical churches promise. Jesus said in the chapter before our text, “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Work does not produce the things we need. Praying is not necessary to obtain the things we need. Out of love, God blesses us – all of us, Christian or non-Christian – by giving us material blessings. So what exactly *do* we do on this day or any other day as far as physical blessings go?

Non-Christians are really stuck in this area. Apart from a relationship with God, the material world is all they have. Jesus says, “The Gentiles seek after all these things.” They are left to worry about their lives and possessions and work hard to get the things they want and need.

For us, it is different. While we are no more deserving of our blessings than non-Christians because we are sinners just as they are, nevertheless, we have a different perspective when it comes to material possessions because of whom God has made us to be. Despite our sin, our selfishness, and our fixation on this life which has separated us from God, God worked to reconcile us to Himself. By sending His Son, Jesus to suffer and die in our place, the barrier of sin has been removed and the separation has ceased. We have the most intimate relationship with the God who created the universe. We are His sons and daughters. We have the most important blessing. By raising His Son, Jesus from the dead, we, too, shall rise and live forever with Him in a place where there will be no physical need whatsoever.

This changes the way we look at our blessings and what we do with our blessings. First of all, when we are tempted to be anxious about our physical needs, we hear the words of Jesus, “Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” We know them to be true. As an ad for the old “This is the Life” Lutheran television program said, “There is more to life than being alive.” We have an eternity waiting for us with blessings beyond our wildest dreams. Knowing this frees us from being

slaves to the acquisition of possessions in this life. Knowing this gives us comfort and hope when material blessings are in short supply at times.

Secondly, when we are tempted to worry about having enough, Jesus says, “For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.” It is important to note that Jesus does not say, “the Lord God knows that you need them all”, but “your *heavenly Father* knows that you need them all.” We are not in relationship with God as a slave to a master, but a child to a father. A father cares for his children. He does not let them go hungry or without clothes or shelter, but he provides for them. He doesn’t make them work for these things. He doesn’t make them ask for the things they need. He simply gives them what they need.

Human fathers sometimes fail in this important calling, but our heavenly Father doesn’t. As the book of Romans says, “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:31-32). If God gave us His Son so that we might have eternal life, will He not also do the lesser job and give us the things we need for this life? The answer is yes.

What is there left for us to do? Instead of scurrying and worrying about things; instead of working hard or praying feverishly to get things, Jesus says simply, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” As we focus our attention on the Word of God and receive His righteousness in Baptism, Absolution, and Holy Communion, our heavenly Father will provide for our needs. All we do is receive them with thanksgiving. And this is not something we do just on a particular day in a special service like this one. Giving thanks to our heavenly Father is as natural and spontaneous a part of the Christian’s life as breathing. As we inhale the many blessings of God, we exhale thanksgiving. The two are inseparably linked together.

Does this mean that we should not work? Not at all. But we don’t work in order that we might earn the things we need. God gives us our vocation and our skills so that we serve our neighbor and be a participant in how God provides for our needs and theirs.

Does it mean that we should not pray for things? Not at all. But we don't pray in order that we might convince God to give us things. In Luther's explanation for the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer in which we ask for "our daily bread", he says, "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." In other words, we do not pray in order to inform God of our needs so that we can convince Him to give them to us, but to remind ourselves that God is the source of all our blessings which He already gives us. We do not pray that we might receive blessings. We pray that we might receive our blessings *with thanksgiving*.

For Christians, "thanksgiving" is not a day, but a lifestyle. It is not something which is natural for us as sinners, but is something created within us as a result of God's love for us in Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us. It is all we have been given to do. We cannot work to earn the things which we need. We do not have pray to get the things which we need. We simply receive all the things which we have as gifts of God's love and give thanks for them. So, give thanks today. Give thanks tomorrow and every day. Give thanks – it's all you have to do! Amen.