

“Enough To Be Thankful For”  
Psalm 106:47

November 26, 2015

Thanksgiving Day

*Psalm 106:47 Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.*

Thanksgiving Day is a holiday that requires stuff – lots of stuff – in order to be enjoyed. Other holidays – Veterans’ Day, Independence Day, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day and so on can be celebrated without stuff. Other holidays also come with lots of stuff – like Christmas. But even without presents, Christmas has other aspects which we can enjoy like seeing Christmas decorations and listening to Christmas music. But without stuff for which to give thanks, what is left of this holiday? Thanksgiving lights? Pumpkin carols?

People strive to acquire and have stuff – lots of stuff - especially at Thanksgiving. It’s not enough just to have food on Thanksgiving but it must be a certain kind of food: turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, green bean casserole, and pumpkin pie. And it can’t be just a meal. It has to be a feast – the kind where there is so much food that it makes you have to loosen your belt and fall asleep in the recliner after you are done eating.

And it’s not enough to just eat the feast (as if nutritional intake was the reason for the season). Thanksgiving is just not Thanksgiving without family and friends around to enjoy the feast with us. Eating Thanksgiving dinner alone in a restaurant just doesn’t seem right. People are part of the “stuff” of Thanksgiving. And not just a few. We want plenty of people whom we love around us and with us to enjoy the Thanksgiving feast.

Finally, it’s not just eating a big feast in the same room with lots of people that makes Thanksgiving a good holiday. It is the joy that is shared by being together for a family feast. A Thanksgiving meal that takes place in a dysfunctional family can be not only an unhappy event, but a torturous one as well. We want a warm joyful atmosphere for our Thanksgiving feast – the kind that will create lasting memories.

Our ability and desire to give thanks then often depends upon how much of this stuff we have. If people have a lot of stuff and are confronted by the abundance of it on Thanksgiving Day, they may actually say a prayer of thanks to God before the meal even if they don't do that the rest of the year. With so much stuff, it's well worth it to give thanks.

However, if we can't afford a big feast, don't have family and friends around, or experience conflict and fighting in a dysfunctional family, we may not be so thankful on Thanksgiving Day. We may complain or feel sorry for ourselves. We don't give thanks to God because we don't feel we have enough to make it worthwhile to give thanks.

Worse yet, if life is like this throughout the year, our attitude of thanklessness may remain the same. If we lack the necessities of life; if we have the necessities of life, but money is tight; if we don't have all of the stuff that everyone else has to which we feel entitled; if we don't have a loving family or no family at all; or if we don't have joy and contentment, we may not be very thankful to God. We think that there's just not enough reason to give thanks.

The problem here is not a lack of stuff or an abundance of stuff. It is our attitude about stuff. We have confused the Creator and the creation. God created us to love and trust in Him and use stuff. Now we love and trust our stuff and use God...usually to try and get more stuff. When we worship at the altar of materialism, we are often going to be disappointed because an idolatrous attitude to the things of this world is rarely satisfied. A lack of satisfaction leads to a lack of giving thanks.

What's the solution? Usually people think that acquiring more stuff will lead to more satisfaction and more satisfaction will increase the giving of thanks. People think, "Lord God, give me more stuff so I can be more thankful." But that's not the solution our text proposes today. The psalmist says, "Save us, O LORD our God,...that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.." Salvation from the root problem, sin, creates thankfulness and praise, not merely dealing with the symptom of sin, dissatisfaction.

Salvation is what Jesus, the Son of God, came to do. He didn't come to bring us more earthly stuff or increase our standard of living. He came to heal the separation between Creator and creatures which sin had caused by taking that sin – the sin of the entire world – upon Himself. By His death on a cross, Jesus has healed the separation that existed between God and us. By His resurrection from the dead, Jesus has given us an entirely new life with an entirely new attitude. He has saved us that we might give thanks to His holy name and live in praise to Him.

Why the new attitude? Because Christ has given us gifts far more valuable than the stuff we strive for here on earth. The Hymn of the Day today, "The Gifts Christ Freely Gives", enumerates these gifts.

We have the gift of belonging to Him. We are His Church, "His chosen, saved, and free people." We have the gift of baptism where He adopts us to be His children, gives us new life, and washes away our sins. We have the gifts of grace and peace through absolution in which forgiveness for all of our sins is spoken to us. We have the gift of His holy Word by which we are spiritually fed. We have the gifts of assurance and strength for our faith in the feast of the Lord's Supper.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying the things of this world are bad or that it is somehow sinful to enjoy them. I'm not saying we should be fasting on Thanksgiving Day rather than feasting. God has created the things of this world for our use and our enjoyment. But I'm saying that you don't need the things of this world to be happy, nor is your thankfulness to and praise of God dependent on how much you have of them. Whether rich or poor, with family or standing alone, many possessions or few, you always have a reason to give thanks to God and always have reason to praise God because you always have the gifts of God.

In these gifts, we have all that we truly need. By these gifts, we have an inexhaustible supply of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. These gifts are never unavailable, never run out, and never expire. These gifts give us everlasting life with God where there will be no shortages, no unhappiness, and no dissatisfaction, but only an abundance of everything, joy beyond our imagination, and complete contentment.

In fact, our Thanksgiving feast can symbolize the greater gifts God gives to us. As we feast today on an abundance of delicious food to satisfy our body's hunger for nourishment, we remember that, in Divine Service, God feeds us with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ to satisfy our soul's desire for forgiveness and peace. And that is only "a foretaste of the feast to come...the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end."

As we gather with friends and family to enjoy this feast today, we remember that we will gather for the Lamb's marriage feast with the entire family of God – all of the prophets and saints of the Old Testament; the apostles and all the saints of the New Testament; all of God's people who have ever lived – fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, fellow members of Peace Lutheran Church and other congregations to which we have belonged – and all who have died in the faith – a fully functional and loving family.

As we enjoy the joy and pleasure of a great meal with great friends, we remember that the joy and pleasure we share now is but a shadow of the eternal joy and perfect pleasure we shall know in the presence of the Lord in heaven. As the Scriptures say, "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," (1 Cor. 2:9)

Thanksgiving Day is a good day with all of the stuff that goes with it. We enjoy the material blessings of God and thank Him for them. But we realize that Thanksgiving Day would be a good day even without all the stuff or less of the stuff. With the psalmist, we say, "Save us, O LORD our God,...that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise." He has...and we do...on this day and every day. Amen.