



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

November 23, 2017

Pastor Randy Ott

Thanksgiving

First Lesson: [Deuteronomy 8:10-18](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 100](#)

Second Lesson: [Philippians 4:10-20](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 17:11-19](#)

Sermon Text: [Philippians 4:10-20](#)

### Lord, Keep Us Thankful!

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

Do you know someone (or is it you) that likes to go around today or this week saying "Happy Turkey Day" to everybody? Do you know anybody like that? I don't suppose there is anything wrong with the greeting, but I prefer ham. Even better, I like when we used to have homemade pizzas every year for Thanksgiving, for Christmas and for Easter. I thought that was even better. But I don't walk around to all of you guys and say "Happy Pizza Day." But I suppose "Happy Turkey Day" because there are a lot of turkeys that get eaten today. It makes sense, I suppose. I had someone suggest to me once that people say "Happy Turkey Day" because somewhere subconsciously they don't want to say "Happy Thanksgiving" because they're just not that thankful. I don't know if that's the case or not, but I do believe that there are times that it is a lot harder to be thankful than others, isn't it? Being thankful sometimes for us is more emotion than attitude. You know how our emotions are. Our emotions are here, they're there, they're here, they're there, they're all over the place.

But being thankful, this prayer **Lord, Keep Us Thankful**, there are times when you and I really need to keep that prayer in the forefront of our minds because there are times it is just hard to be thankful, especially when we're going through hard times. This year if you've had a year that has been just full of challenges, you lost a loved one, you lost a job, you lost a relationship, someone that you pledged to spend the rest of your life with has said or done things that has hurt you to your very core, and now you're here in church with a bunch of smiling people that all got cleaned up and dressed up and they're all sitting here smiling and you're sitting there on the inside hurting. It's hard to be thankful. If you stood by the open grave of someone you love, sometimes it's hard to be thankful.

I don't know what you've been through this year (joys, sorrows, everywhere in between), but I do believe we all have reasons to be thankful that are not dependent upon our emotions or how we feel or what we see. They are dependent upon some truths that exist outside of us. I think if we consider these words that Paul wrote for the Philippians, we can start to understand. Then, by the grace of God and the work of the Spirit in our hearts, Lord willing, we can begin to live it. **Lord, Keep Me Thankful!**

Paul was writing to the Philippians. He was writing from prison. It's a really interesting letter because he is writing from prison and the theme of the letter is *Rejoice in the Lord always. I'll say it again, rejoice.* Did you hear what I said? He was writing **from prison**. He wasn't writing from that table you're going to sit around later today where it's a little easier to rejoice in the Lord. He was in prison! Yet he still writes this way. He's thanking them for the gift they had sent him to support him while he was in prison, through the man named Epaphroditus. But it kind of sounds like he's begging a little bit for more gifts, doesn't it?

He talks about thanking them for the gift and he even comes straight out and says "Not that I'm looking for another gift." I believe him. I believe him for this reason. When he writes this letter, he's writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He has no ulterior motives. He's writing what the Spirit led him to write. This is the Word of God, and he's expressing his love and his thanks to people that he loves in the Lord. So I believe him when he says what he says.

But notice he says, "I'm not looking for more gifts because **I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**" Isn't that interesting? Being content in EVERY situation? That's a challenge! That's the kind of challenge we were talking about.

So how does he do it? What is the secret? What is the secret? You should put that kind of secret in a book and it would be a best seller, wouldn't it? I suppose it is. I suppose the Bible is the best seller the world has ever seen.

The secret that he points us to is...well, when you're in kindergarten in our grade school, or you're in kindergarten in Sunday school, what was the answer to every single question? Every question that was ever asked, what was the answer you gave no matter what it was? Jesus, right? The answer to every question in kindergarten is Jesus when you're talking about Bible stuff. Some days we just need to keep going back and giving kindergarten answers to our life. "**I can do all things through him who gives me strength.**" That's Jesus.

This is a constant in your life and in my life. God's love for us in Christ is what gives us strength. God's love for us in Christ is not dependent upon my emotions or my feelings. God's love for me in Christ continues on and is there always as a source of strength no matter if I'm here or there. God's love for me in Christ is always perfect. It's a 10. It's

always across the top, right? Unless you're spinal tapped and then it's an 11, all the way across the top. It's perfect at all times. It's not up and down, like you and I are. It's perfect.

That's what our Psalm of the Day kind of focused on, right? **“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise...”** Why? Because he is God and he made us. *His faithfulness continues forever.* That's what the Psalm said. God is constant, perfect in this rock steady source of love for us, even when we feel unloved and even when we're struggling and even when we're worried and even when we're sick and even when we're grieving. When we're going through all these things, God's love is that constant.

How do I know it's mine? Because we are his sheep, his flock, the sheep of his pasture. He did it. He sent Christ to live and die in my place. He gave me the gift of faith, and I pray he has done it for you.

Then, whatever we go through, when we go back to that One who gives us strength, in our attitude now, God will keep us thankful. It doesn't mean it's going to be easy. It doesn't mean it's always going to be fun. But I have a reason to always give thanks because of who God is and who he has made me. That's the source of the strength that I have that is beyond my own strength.

When I find it harder to give thanks (I'm guessing it's the same for you), it's because the devil has me looking in other directions instead of at that kindergarten answer. Instead of looking at God's love for me in Jesus, I'm looking at what troubles me. Instead of looking at God's love for me in Jesus, I'm looking at this diagnosis. Instead of looking at God's love for me in Jesus, I'm looking at an account balance and wondering how I'm going to pay the bills. But in the middle of my worry, my stress, my anxiety and my pain, when I stop and look at Jesus, there is always a reason to be thankful. **“I can do all things through him who gives me strength.”** It's the one certainty in our life.

So **Lord, Keep Me Thankful** in my attitude. No relying on my emotions, but in this attitude that I have no matter what I'm facing. **Keep me thankful Lord.** Then **Lord, Keep Me Thankful** and let it show. Let me live my thankfulness.

Isn't that what Paul was pointing out about the Philippians? He says, “I'm not thanking you for this because I'm trying to get another gift out of you. Instead, I'm trying to show a credit to your account.” What does that mean? I thought Jesus paid for everything? I thought we don't pay for anything? What account is he talking about?

Paul is crystal clear on that truth when you read his letters. **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”** ([Ephesians 2:8-9.](#)) He's crystal clear on it. It's not like an account so that you are paying for your sins. So what does he mean then?

When I look at you guys, I can't see into your heart. I can't see your faith. All I can go by is what you're saying and what you're doing. That's the only thing I can see. When I see those things, in my mind, I guess I'm going to think, *Yeah, they are a Christian. They are living their faith.* I think it's the same way there. It's to their account to show that faith lived in their hearts. That the Gospel that they had heard had changed them. That they didn't just give lip service to it, but it became a part of them and it changed who they were. It changed how they lived. It changed their focus. And it showed up in how they served one another and how they served Paul. So, **Lord, Keep Me Thankful** in my actions.

I think one of the things I think of often is **Keep Me Thankful** for this community of believers that we have. Sometimes we can annoy each other. We're sinners. We can do that. We might think *I don't need them. They're not important to me. I'll worship God on my own. I don't need to go and be there with other Christians.* But I really believe God's plan is that we gather together in this community so that we do the things that the Philippians were doing for Paul and that Paul was doing for the Philippians. That we encourage one another. That we build one another up. That we thank and appreciate this idea that God has given us one another to be gifts in our lives. At times I need my fellow Christians to call me to account when I'm making excuses for my sins. I need them to admonish me or rebuke me, as Scripture says. There are times when I'm so low because I don't think things are going the way they should or I've failed God in this area or that area that I need you as my brothers and sisters in Christ to remind me, *Christ died for that sin, you dummy! Look at him.* That's what we do as this community of believers.

If I'm sitting on my own, I'm basically, how did Satan describe it? A roaring lion looking for someone to devour. If I try to go it on my own, I'm really hanging a big T-bone around my neck as a necklace and saying "Here Satan. Here kitty, kitty, kitty. Come have some lunch." That's why this community of believers we have is something to be thankful for and it's something to show our thanksgiving for as we encourage one another, as we do all these things that God has called us to do.

Then, another way to show our thanksgiving in our actions is to reach out to those who don't yet know. What do we call it? The peace of God that passes all understanding. You and I get to be the vocal chords of God. We are his voice. So I suppose in a real sense, as you live to thank God, either he is going to have laryngitis in your life, or he's going to speak faithfully through you as you share Jesus with others.

Isn't it cool? We get to live this thanksgiving and point others to this rock solid certainty that Jesus loves us no matter what we go through? So if we have joys to celebrate today, God's love is there with us. If we have sorrows that lead us to use the napkin to brush away a tear, God is there with us in his love. This is our God. We are blessed to be his flock. Amen.