

# Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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November 24, 2005  
Thanksgiving Day

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 8:10-18  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 100  
Second Lesson: Philippians 4:10-20  
Gospel: Luke 17:11-19

## Thanksgiving Day

That time of the year is coming when parents have to sit down with their young children and explain to them exactly what they should be doing after they shred all that brightly colored paper and spread it all over the room—no matter what is on the inside, they need to make sure they say “thank you” to whoever gave them the gift. Why do we have to sit down and remind our children of that? It could be something they really wanted and they could be so excited that they run off and play with it and forget to say “thank you”, or it could be that it is something that they really don’t care for and they don’t want to say “thank you”. To teach them what is appropriate, we have to sit them down and tell them that whatever it is they open, they need to make sure they say “thank you” to the person who gave them that gift.

It is really exactly what the Lord said to the Israelites in our first Scripture reading this morning. They had wandered in the desert for 40 years. They had spent 400 and some years in Egypt away from the land that God had promised that he would give to the descendents of Abraham. Now they were about to enter into that Promised Land and take possession of it. God knew that he would bless them—that they would take cities that they had not built and they would live in them. They would enjoy the fruit of this land flowing with milk and honey and they would be richly blessed. The Israelites were kind of a lot like us—when things are going really well we kind of hurt our shoulders patting ourselves on the back for what a good job we have been doing. We can forget to acknowledge that it is God’s hand that has given us all these blessings.

So the Lord reminds the Israelites, and the reminder is appropriate for us, that when God has blessed us richly to make sure that we stop and acknowledge the blessings that come from his hand. The incredible thing is all the times that we have been full of ourselves—arrogance, pride, giving ourselves credit instead of God—Christ Jesus lived perfectly in our place for those sins and died on the cross for those sins. He has taken them away completely also.

Our first lesson for this Thanksgiving morning comes from Deuteronomy 8:10-18:

*When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God,*

*who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.*

### **Time for Silent Meditation**

How have I forgotten the Lord?  
In what areas do I struggle with pride instead of thanking God?  
What blessings from God do I take for granted?  
How can I thank God for the one way covenant of forgiveness he has given me?

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We might say to ourselves that we haven't been abundantly blessed in the past year. In fact, I faced difficulty. I faced hardship. I faced heartache. I faced challenges to my physical life, to my financial life, to my relationships. Think of the countless people across our country just this past year that had to endure natural disaster—hurricanes, tornadoes, the loss of everything that they had possessed. We might wonder how a person can possibly be thankful at Thanksgiving.

As Christians we have a very distinct advantage because Paul tells us in our Second Lesson from Philippians that we can follow his example of knowing the secret to being content in any and every situation—whether we are in want or in plenty. For us as Christians, our joy, our thankfulness, our contentment isn't dependent upon the outward circumstances that we experience. It is dependent upon him who gives us strength and as Paul says, "I can do everything in Christ Jesus"—to be in Christ Jesus, to have these glorious riches God has given us, reminds us that we have a God who has promised to be at our side through everything. We have a God who has promised to be with us and sustain us and meet all of our needs—not all of our wants—but he has promised to meet all of our needs. In Christ Jesus we know that the things of this world are here and they are gone, but the treasure that we have in Christ lasts for an eternity.

So the secret to being content and being able to be thankful is to give thanks in all circumstances, as our God has commanded us to do. For it is his will for us in Christ Jesus to thank God for our problems, our challenges, and our difficulties because he allowed them into our lives so that we are drawn closer to him and rely on his strength and not on our own.

That is the truth that Paul wrote to the Philippians about in Philippians 4:10-20, our Second Lesson for this morning:

*I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this*

*because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. 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.*

*Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

*To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

### **Time for Silent Meditation**

How do I struggle with being content?  
Do I thank God for being in want as much as for living in plenty?  
When do I fail to live in the confidence God will meet all my needs?  
How does thankfulness for Christ move me to action?

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Maybe some of you will go brave the crowds tomorrow and go shopping. Maybe some of you won't, but you are probably familiar with ads that have a very attractive price and then you look at the fine print in the ad and it says "after rebate". Have you ever went and bought one of those things and sent in the rebate—filled it all out—and then it gets sent back to you "denied" because you cut out the wrong little square of lines going up and down, the wrong UPC code on the box, or didn't quite fill out everything perfectly. So that rebate with all that money you thought you were getting back you don't get because you didn't meet every condition that was demanded in the rebate form. That would be kind of a frustrating experience.

Imagine what life would be like if God's blessings to us came only conditionally—only if you and I met a certain requirement, then God would bless us? How frightening would life be if that were the case? How frightening would it be that God would only bless us or God would only show us his love if we first did something to deserve it from him? You and I are born in sin. We are steeped in sin. Our minds are deceitful. We are self-centered and our sinful nature wants us to go our way and not God's way. Yet God, in his love, reaches out to us unconditionally. In his grace and in his mercy he showers blessings—the sun and the rain fall on the righteous and the unrighteous alike it tells us in Scripture.

In our Gospel today, we see a group of ten men who lived apart from people—who lived a miserable life that when anyone came close to them they had to shout out "unclean"

to keep people away from them. They couldn't touch a loved one. I can't imagine going through life like that. Yet when they cried out to God to have pity on them, Jesus did and he healed them. As they were on their way to the priest, they saw they were healed and nine kept going and one came back and threw himself in the dirt and said, "I am nothing. You are everything". He gave thanks and praise to Jesus. Jesus was looking for praise and deserved praise and expected praise from all ten. Yet he didn't strike those nine down with leprosy again. They continued to enjoy his grace and his blessing unconditionally.

You and I have received unconditional love in Christ, our sins have been taken away, and our God doesn't tell us to never sin again or else we will lose this blessing. His love for us is so intense and so large that he welcomes us back when his Spirit moves us to repent as he says to us, "You are forgiven. You are my own". God's unconditional love is an incredible thing especially when you recognize how forgetful we are.

Our Gospel for Thanksgiving Day is from Luke 17:11-19:

*Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"*

*When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.*

*One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.*

*Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."*

### **Time for Silent Meditation**

When have I forgotten to return and give thanks to God?  
How does it feel to know God still loves me, even when I forget?  
How and why do I throw myself at Jesus' feet daily?  
Faith in Christ saves. Is there any greater comfort!