



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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November 27, 2008  
Thanksgiving Day  
Deuteronomy 8:10-18  
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

### How Do We Give Thanks to the Lord?

Thanksgiving is a national holiday that's filled up with a lot of traditions, right? But think for a minute. What is your family tradition for how you give thanks? I'm not asking what you do on Thanksgiving. You stuff yourself and you watch lousy football. I know what most of you are going to do. I'm asking how you give thanks, because that's the name of it right?—Thanksgiving. What do you do to stop and give thanks? Do you do it at your meal? Do you do it later? Do you take turns saying something you're thankful for? I don't know, there are a lot of different ways you can do it I suppose, but have you ever just stopped and thought about that? What am I actually doing to give thanks to God as opposed to something that's just benefitting me today?

It's kind of an interesting thought, an interesting question, and it really is a question addressed in what I just read to you from Deuteronomy. They weren't talking about a national day of Thanksgiving, but Moses certainly was urging the people to remember to be thankful to God, to remember God when they entered the land and take the land that God was going to give them. These words come from Deuteronomy, the second giving of the Law. This is when Moses is talking to that generation that grew up while they were wandering around in the wilderness for those 40 years. These people weren't the ones that went in and were there and looked across the River Jordan into the Promised Land in the beginning and had the spies tell them, "We can't take the land. They are like giants. We are like grasshoppers." This was the generation that had to suffer the results of that generation. These are the ones that had grown up in the wilderness, who had wandered around, who had endured hardship, who had to eat quail and manna and then the next day they got to eat quail and manna. These were the people that spent 40 years just wandering around, going from place to place.

So they had it kind of tough for 40 years. So Moses is saying to them, "Now when you get to this land, because pretty soon the Lord is going to send us over the river, we are going to conquer the land. God's going to give you a land, and you're going to settle down, and you're going to enjoy the benefits of a land that was not yours but that God is giving to you. Now when that happens, you need to remember who gave it to you. You need to remember who took care of you in the desert. You need to remember who has done all of these things because when you get there, your sinful nature is going to want to pat yourself on the back and say, 'Look at what we've done! We've done some good things. Look at all the things I've done to take care of myself and my family and everything else under the sun.'" He says, "If you do that, you'll forget God."

But there was another phrase in there that I find really interesting. He says, “Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God.” Then how does he define forgetting the Lord your God? Did you hear this as I read it to 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 get to the land and are satisfied, you are going to say ‘I’ve done all this’ and it wasn’t God.” Do you notice how he connects remembering God and thanking God with obeying everything God had said? All his decrees and commands and his laws that Moses was giving to them that day—that’s how he was telling them they were to remember God and thank God for what God had done, by living for God. And the commands, the decrees and the laws that he was giving them, if you’ve read Deuteronomy, this is again Moses talking to that generation and he is reiterating all the things that they didn’t hear because they were too young or they weren’t born yet when he had spoken all the words of the covenant, all the decrees and the laws and the commands at Mount Sinai. So Deuteronomy literally means “The second giving of the law,” and that’s what’s going on. He’s giving them, the second time, all the commands that God had given—not just the Ten Commandments. But we are talking about commands that covered every area of their life—their worship life, how they were to be governed, how they were to deal with each other, how they were to treat criminals, how they were to treat accidents and injuries, how they were to treat outsiders—every last aspect of their life is detailed in these decrees, these laws and these commands down to, as we read it today, we think it’s kind of dry minutia that God is addressing every area of their life. But when you think about that, God is telling them, through Moses, “The way to remember that it is I who have done all this for you is to make sure that you remember my commands and live for me in every area of your life.”

Those words for the Israelites are sure important for us today, too, aren’t they? When things are going well, we can get pretty busy patting ourselves on the back and saying, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” From time to time we need to stop and remember that it’s not us but it’s the Lord that has given us the ability to have whatever it is that we enjoy. Then we need to consider how we might use it well.

They might be tempted because they had endured hardship and now they were going to have it easy. So they might not remember the Lord as clearly as when they depended upon him in the wilderness. You and I haven’t come out of the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula, but you and I know for a certainty that God has delivered us from a greater wilderness. He has delivered us from our sins. In our baptism, he clothed us with the righteousness of Jesus so that when God looks at us he doesn’t see our sin. He sees Jesus’ perfection. Through his Word, he shows us day after day where we have fallen short, where we have given ourselves too much credit and not given God enough credit. And in his Word he tells us that Christ died for that sin. In the Sacrament, he comes to us and he says, “Here’s the very body and blood that was given and poured out for you. It has taken away your sins.”

When we are confronted with our sin, we can think we need God. But maybe when we aren’t focused quite as clearly on who we are and we start thinking about what we have, we forget how desperately we need God, not just to take away our sins, but to help us

through everything in life—the good, the bad, and the challenges that come, because the challenges do come.

So how then do we thank God? That becomes an interesting question, I really believe, and I think it becomes a very humbling question to think about how to thank God for what he has done for you. When you look at who God is and what he has done for us, you look at not only how he has taken away our sins, but he gives us what we need for life. Look at how he blesses us with, at times abundance, but at times with challenges, and how he promises to be there in those challenges. Then look at how often you and I doubt that he is going to be there in those challenges. It's humbling to see how far we fall short of what God expects of us. Then consider how he continues to bless us even though so often we wander from him or deny him or get focused on other things. How do we thank God?

As many of you know, this last weekend my daughter and I were in a car accident. The van was totaled and by God's grace, neither of us was seriously injured. But this past Tuesday, the claims adjuster called me up and told me, "As you know, the car is totaled. But I'm sure glad to hear you survived." When you have a guy that looks at car wrecks for a living tell you he's glad to hear you survived, it kind of sends a chill down your spine a little bit. And I think of why the Lord would still have me here. When I think of some of the friends I have that the Lord has called to heaven and they are with him in heaven, how can I thank him that he's preserved my life? It brings all kinds of questions to your mind.

First of all, why does he leave me here and he takes these others to heaven? I can't answer that question, so one of the ways I thank him is to stop asking questions I can't answer and start asking the questions I can, like what does he want me to do? He wants me to first of all be comforted that those who have died in the Lord are with the Lord and that they are enjoying a glory beyond anything you and I are enjoying here. Then secondly, he wants us to focus on how we can thank him for the blessings he gives us—forgiveness, life and salvation.

The way that you and I thank him for those gifts I think is the same exact way for the Israelites. In every area of our lives, we serve him to the best of our ability, not just offering a prayer of thanks from time to time, but realizing that in every day, in every area, in every situation we find ourselves, it really is an opportunity for us to serve God. So for me in my role as pastor, as husband, as father, as son, as friend, as neighbor, as citizen, whatever it might be, as teacher, as at times student, in every one of those areas then, if I use my gifts and abilities to the best of my ability and give glory to God by serving him faithfully according to his will in each and every one of those situations, that's how I thank God for the gifts he has given me. That's how I thank God then for letting me be here today.

It's the same for you isn't it? Whatever situation you find yourself in in life, when you serve to the best of your ability and obey his decrees, his laws and his commands that he says "Here's how you show your love for me" in every area of your life, that's how you are saying "thank you." And every area of your life is vital!

If you are a parent and you say to your child, “Jesus loves you. He has taken away your sins,” as you tuck them in at night, that’s just as vital as any called worker that stands in front of a classroom and teaches, isn’t it? That’s how you thank God and glorify God.

If you are a spouse and your spouse has done what spouse’s do, said something that hurts or said something stupid or done something stupid—spouse I said, I didn’t just say husband. I said spouse. When that happens, when you look them in the eye and say, “I forgive you for the sake of Jesus,” that’s just as vital and just as important and just as much a service of thanksgiving to God as when I stand in front of the congregation and absolve you of your sins, isn’t it? It’s a different area of life, but it is where you serve God and where you thank God.

If you are a friend and your friend is going through tough times and you say to them, “I see you are having trouble. Can I tell you where I find my strength and how my God has helped me through difficulty in the past.” That is just as vital and just as important and just as God-pleasing and just as much your service of thanksgiving to God as if you’re across the world handing out food to the poor or bandages to the sick. You cannot minimize the opportunities God places in front of you to serve him.

Now it is true, you and I will fail to seize every one of those opportunities. You and I will be distracted. We will be tired at times. We will be cranky at times and we won’t serve God as faithfully as we should. We won’t be as loving and as kind and we won’t clearly see those opportunities God gives us to thank him, but that’s why today is such a blessing, isn’t it? We get to come to his altar and receive his body and blood and hear him say, “This was given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins. I love you. I brought you out of the wilderness of sin when you had nothing to offer to me, and I forgive you. I am going to send you out now so that you can continue to serve me in response to the love I have shown to you.”

That’s how we remember the Lord. We remember him by serving him each and every day of our lives out of love for what he has done for us in Christ.

The Israelites are to come before the Lord with thanksgiving.

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.

**Psalm of the Day**

Psalm 100 (page 104)

**The Second Lesson**Philippians 4:10-20

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Paul rejoices in the Lord for the Philippians

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 forever and ever. Amen.

**Gospel**

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."

**Prayer of the Day**

Almighty God our Father, your generous goodness comes to us new every day. By the work of your Spirit lead us to acknowledge your goodness, give thanks for your benefits, and serve you in willing obedience through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.