



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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November 24, 2011

Thanksgiving

Sermon Text: [Psalm 100](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

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

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

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

We Thank You For Your Blessings

One of the simple joys in reading Scripture is finding sections that thrill you when you read their description of you. When you read in one of Peter's letters that "you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God," that's pretty neat. It's pretty nice when God tells us what he has made us and what he has done for us. Then sometimes there are those moments in Scripture when you read what God wants you to be in response to that. You think to yourself, "Gee, maybe that's not always me."

This morning this beautiful Psalm says "Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name." It talks about being eager and excited and just more excited to come and worship God than when your favorite team scores a touchdown, right? That's kind of the picture it is painting. Joyful songs, loud noises, exuberant outbursts...is that always us?

Parents here, did any of you have to really fight with your kids to get them going this morning to get them to come to church, or were they out at the car already saying "Come on, mom! Come on, dad! Hurry up! We have to get there!" We don't always approach worshiping our God like it's a Black Friday sale, do we? I didn't see any tents outside the church last night.

In our heart of hearts as Christians, we know that our God is much more important than all the other things that we get excited about, right? So the question kind of comes, why don't we get as excited at times. I think it's because at times we get distracted in our day-to-day living, in our day-to-day struggles, in our day-to-day worries, and our day-to-day anxieties that we don't even view coming into God's house to praise him and have him speak to us and us speak to him and us speak to each other as a refuge and a sanctuary away from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Sometimes we think of it more as just another thing to do on the to-do list that we just have to get out of the way.

This Psalm then reminds us that for Christians, giving thanks to God isn't really a one day a year thing. It isn't even a one week thing that we do. One of the things we do weekly (hopefully) is come together to worship our Lord and thank him with joy in our hearts. But the reasons that the Psalm gives us for doing this are reasons that touch us and comfort us and move us every day of our lives. It doesn't matter where we are, what we are doing, or where we are going, the reasons we have to be joyful and thank

our God are certain and absolute, and they exist outside of us. They exist outside of how we even at times feel about them. That's important to remember because as we come together today and across the nation, people are taking the time to stop and be thankful. Some people don't know who to give thanks to so they're just thankful for this and that.

You and I come together and we know who we are thankful to and we know who we give thanks to, but where we are in our life might be completely different than where we were last year. It's probably going to be completely different from where we will be at this time next year. So sometimes when we gather together on a day like this, we kind of shuffle our feet and think to ourselves, "I don't have that much to be thankful about. Life has been tough. Life has been hard. It's full of struggles and it's full of challenges, and I'm sorry, but I just don't feel that thankful." That might be you. That might be the person sitting in front of you or behind you or down the road from you. Or you might be the person who looks at everything in your life right now and thinks "Wow! I'm riding the top of the wave. Things are going great. Work is going great. Relationships are going great. Everything is just going wonderful. I can't believe how richly God is blessing me in all these areas." That might be you or the person across the aisle or in front of or behind you. But if you're on the peak of the mountain or you're on the bottom of the valley and things seem so dark right now, it doesn't matter. The psalmist tells us we still have two great reasons to always be thankful. If we're at the top or the bottom or anywhere in between, we can be thankful because of who our God is and what he has done that exists outside of our feelings.

This is a challenge for us, isn't it, to look outside of our feelings and think about how thankful I feel instead of looking at the things that we have to be thankful for. The two he mentions in here are basic Christian truths that we know, but they shape our lives. They change us. They comfort us. They encourage us.

It's never a fun thing to have someone else call you a farm animal, right? We don't like that. Unless of course it's our God that does it. That's what he did to you this morning, didn't he? "Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture." When God calls us his sheep, that's a good thing. We can be thankful he made us. We can be thankful he gives us what we need for body and life. That's wonderful. We should thank God for that. But what he gives us for body and life is always up and down. One year it might be more; the next year it might be less. But the fact that he has made us his sheep, a part of his flock; what he has done for you and me, those who believe that Jesus is our Savior, he has gone farther than just giving us what we need for body and life. He has given us eternal life through the life and death of Jesus.

You and I can't make ourselves a part of God's flock or a part of his family by our efforts, by our intentions, or by our good looks. None of that is going to do it. But he did it for us. He came and took our place and was perfect in every place where we have failed. Think about this. All the times you and I have to get dragged to church, all the times you and I aren't excited to be here, every time Jesus entered God's gates, his

heart was perfect toward his heavenly Father. His joy was perfect in our place. His love and his gladness and his joy and his thanksgiving and his praise was absolutely perfect each and every time because ours isn't always that way, right? He was perfect in our place. He took all of our sins; all of the times we wonder where God is, all the times we accuse God of not blessing us in the way that is best, he took all those sins and he carried them to Calvary. He gave us the Holy Spirit through the Word, through Baptism, to make us a part of his flock. That can't be taken from us.

The Holy Spirit has Paul go to great lengths; there is a whole paragraph devoted to this in Romans. "Neither height, nor depth, nor angels, nor demons, neither the present or the future." He goes through this whole list and then, just because we might come up with an exception, at the end he says "nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus." (See [Romans 8:37-39](#).) So if you are at the top, or at the bottom, or at the peak, or at the valley, you can be thankful that you are never there alone. Your God has made you a part of his flock. He has taken away your sins. He has given you eternal life. And he isn't going to desert you now. That truth shapes us and changes our life and our outlook on how we go about our daily lives.

Now we live for him. We live to thank him. We live to honor him. It's not just all about us. It's all about him. He gives us a purpose for life. A purpose doesn't have to be in many other things that people choose. Our purpose is to thank and glorify God who has made us a part of his flock.

We can be absolutely certain that nothing will ever separate us from his love because of the other reason that the Psalm talks about, why we can enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. It says "For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."

That's one of the things about the passage of time, isn't it? Every year at Thanksgiving you can look back and there are going to be changes that have taken place in your life in the last year. Maybe the Lord has brought someone new into your life or taken someone out of your life. Maybe the Lord has blessed you with marriage or a child. Maybe the Lord has blessed you with a new job. Or maybe you are in the middle of struggling because you've lost a job. There are always changes from year to year in our lives. Some thrill us. Some increase Roloids sales. That's just the nature of the beast in every area of our life, except one. The Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

God's love for you in Christ is not a need that is going to need to be replaced with something else. God's love for you in Christ is not an appendix that is ever going to be cut out and thrown into the waste bucket. God's love for you in Christ is not a job that is going to be downsized. God's love for you in Christ is certain and absolute. It is unchanging. Everything else in your life changes. God's love for you in Christ, his faithfulness continues through all generations. It endures forever. It is perfect. It is complete. And it is absolute.

Every time we gather together in this house to worship our God, every time you come into God's presence in your house when you open your Bible and start reading about God's love, every time you enter into his presence, you can do it with thanksgiving because of those truths. You are a part of his flock and he will never be the source of the change that removes you from that flock. His faithfulness continues forever. His love is perfect and complete.

If you're at the top, focus on that truth. If you're in the valley, focus on that truth. If you're somewhere in between, focus on that truth. We'll always have a reason to shout for joy to the Lord.