



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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October 13, 2013

Pentecost 21

Sermon Text: [2 Corinthians 1:8-11](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [1 Samuel 12:20-24](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 111](#)

Second Lesson: [2 Corinthians 1:8-11](#)

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

The Believer Grows in Christian Character Christians Live A Life Of Thanksgiving

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

It's getting to be that time of year, but it's really not quite here yet. The time of the year when you come to church and hear the gospel of the 10 lepers being healed. Usually when that is read at church, if you come in the morning, there is probably the smell (if you're fortunate) of pie, turkey, all the trimmings, all the fixings. It's the Gospel every year for Thanksgiving. So we are a little bit ahead of schedule, but I suppose as Christians who struggle in our life to fight against our sinful nature and serve our Lord faithfully, it's probably a pretty good thing that we hear more than one reminder a year to live a life of thanksgiving, to grow in this trait of thanking God, especially when you consider what Paul writes today. He's reminding us to thank God in all circumstances. I'll tell you, it isn't easy. I know I struggle with it. But we'll get there.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth at least two letters, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. Then we think there might have been at least one, maybe two lost letters. I think he did it because that church in Corinth was kind of like... do you ever get a pebble stuck in your shoe? You're in some place where you can't just stop and take your shoe off and get rid of it, like maybe right now? You walk and it hurts, and it hurts, and it hurts, and it's annoying. You can't quite shake it out to get it so it doesn't annoy you or hurt you. That's kind of what Corinth was to Paul.

They were kind of messed up in the idea of what serving God was all about. They had someone committing incest and they were saying, "Look at how free we are in Christ to do things that previously we thought were wrong." Then he had to write and say, "No, it's wrong. Hand that person over to Satan. Don't confirm him in his sin." He had to be pretty stern.

They had clicks in Corinth. "I follow Paul. I follow Peter. I follow Apollos. I follow Jesus." Of course if a different group followed someone other than the guy you followed, they were idiots and you were smart. So it led to problems within the church that he had to deal with.

They had problems in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. They had people getting drunk at the fellowship meal before they came to Communion. They were messed up. They were as dysfunctional as dysfunctional could be, yet Paul continues to work and

write with them and try to encourage them in their life to grow closer to their Savior. In fact, as he writes 2 Corinthians, a lot of it is to deal with one special problem that was going on at that point in time.

After he had left Corinth and went onto another place in his missionary journey, evidently later some kind of super apostles came in, the TV preachers of the day. These guys were looked up to and respected as having great knowledge. They came in and kind of patted Paul on the head and his ministry and said, "Yeah, he taught you about Jesus. That's good. But we know more. He left out an awful lot, so we are going to fill in what was lacking." Unfortunately, what they filled in was at times things of the Law, what you have to do in order to be saved. If you think you can do anything to save yourself, then you've emptied the cross of its power. Why would Jesus leave heaven, live and die in your place, if you could have saved yourself? So he is writing first of all to say it's all about Jesus. It isn't about our knowledge. It's about Jesus. Secondly, he spends a lot of time starting with what I read to you... defending his apostleship, saying he wasn't some second-rate apostle. It's the most personal of his letters. He details at length the struggles he went through as he preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But what I find amazing is as he details these problems, he teaches us to stop and give thanks to God because God has a purpose through all of our troubles and to be thankful even if we don't see it right away.

He writes in this section that I read to you because the super apostles were saying, "You can't trust Paul. Paul is not good on his word. He told you he was going to come back and now he delayed his coming back. Instead of making two visits like he planned, he is only going to make one, so don't trust him and don't trust his word. That collection that he has been gathering for the famine in Jerusalem? That's probably a bunch of malarkey too. He's probably just pocketing all the money." They were really attacking him.

I have to believe that 1st Century congregational life in Greece, in Corinth, was a lot like it is anywhere and everywhere yet today. When certain things start being repeated, whether or not they're true, if enough people repeat it, it is viewed as true. That's the same thing that happens around here at times yet today.

So Paul writes and tells them why. After his greetings, after he stopped and gave thanks for the pebble in his shoe, he says to them he is going to tell them why he didn't come right away. He says, "We don't want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia." Asia Minor... we aren't sure exactly where. It could have been Ephesus, but there were a lot of places that fit what he says next. "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death." So, "sorry we didn't get there right away, but I thought I was going to be dead" is basically what he is saying. I would have probably said it a little bit differently with a little more of an edge to it, but Paul just explains it.

Then he said, "But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead." God who raises the dead... he could be talking about how they felt like they were going to die and then God gave them life again. It felt like he raised the dead. But I think it's probably more of a warning ahead to one of the things he's going to talk about at length... the vast supremacy importance of Jesus Christ. God raised Jesus from the dead, and that's what really matters. Don't rely on yourself. Rely on the God who raised your Savior from the dead.

In reality, I think what he is doing here is a bit of a dig at the super apostles who talk about how they are all of this and all of that. They are relying on themselves. "I am not going to rely on myself because my strength is not anywhere near as strong as God's 'weakness'" as he says in another letter. He said, "I almost died. I thought I was going to die. That's why I didn't quite get there on your schedule. But in reality, it served the kingdom of God in a greater way because it taught me to rely on God, not on myself. So now in my ministry as I go forward, I'll be able to teach others even more fully, more forcefully and more faithfully to rely on Jesus and not on themselves. That will be a blessing for the kingdom."

But as Paul was enduring whatever he was enduring, I don't think he was saying "Hey, this is great! Thank you Lord. You have a great plan going here. I really love it." I have to think his sinful nature was struggling, don't you think? "God, what is going on? God, deliver me. God, let me go so I can go preach your Word to more people." I think he had to struggle for a time, but when he got through it, he could see what God was doing. Then he gave thanks to God that God taught him this lesson. And he thanked the Corinthians that they were praying for him. And as God continued to deliver him and the Gospel continued to be preached through him, more and more people would give thanks to God for who God is, not for who Paul was, not for who the Corinthians were, but for who God is. That's the most important thing. Sometimes as we get busy in our own lives it's easy to forget.

To live a life of thanksgiving that thanks God at all times in all circumstances, that's tough. We see Paul doing it, but it's tough. All these characteristics that we are talking about for Christians are a struggle because our sinful nature is not inclined to lead us to say, "Thank you Lord for this difficulty." So we've got to fight against our sinful nature. You know how we are. We might not be facing death like Paul did because we preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but each and every single one of us here has things at one time or another that worry us or trouble us, that maybe keep us up at night. Have you ever had one of those nights? Where you can't sleep because you are worried about health, or someone else's health, relationship problems, work problems, family problems, family squabbles, whatever it is, something that leads you get situated just right and then all of a sudden the pillow is too warm. So you flip it over to the cool side of the pillow. You still can't get to sleep and the pillow is warm again, so you have to flip it back over to the other cool side, and you're tossing and turning and the whole night goes by and you can't hardly sleep. You think you're awake, but maybe you're asleep. You're not sure. You wake up exhausted. After a night like that when you're stressing and worrying about something, do you swing your feet over the edge of the

bed, put them on the floor and say, "Thank you Lord for leading me to rely more on you as I struggle with this problem"? Did you ever do that? Once? Even think about it? It's hard in the moment, isn't it? That's why it's a struggle.

For this struggle, we can't rely on ourselves. In this struggle to see that God is still in control, even when we can't feel it or see it or taste it or touch it, we need God's help. We need to rely on God more. So that means we need to be closer to him. We need to come to him in his Word. We need to come to him so that he can speak his promises to us and strengthen us. We need to come to him in the Sacraments so he can say to us, "This was poured out to take away your sins of doubt and worry. I've taken them away in Christ."

The more we get to know Christ, the more we rely on him, we meet someone who is absolutely incredible. I can't fathom the love Jesus has for me and that he has for you. I can't. I rejoice in it. I trust it. But I can't fathom it.

That Psalm we sang this morning... Psalm 111... Psalm 111 through 118 they sang in Jesus' day at the Passover celebration. Great are the works of the Lord, and majestic are his works, and all that. His praiseworthy deeds will be proclaimed, all those things we sang, lead to a celebration of how the Angel of Death passed over them in Egypt. It fits. But can you picture Jesus on that Passover celebration the day before he dies singing one of the phrases that we sang this morning? His works are faithful and just... his, the Lord. The Lord's works are faithful and just. God is faithful and keeps all his promises, but just? Just means that if God says he is going to punish something, he punishes it.

Jesus sang those words knowing full well the next day he was going to be on a cross even though he had never sinned! He was going to be on that cross because you sinned, because I sinned, because everyone in the world sins. He was taking our wickedness, our doubt, all the things we have done, and he carried them to the cross so they would be punished. Yet, the night before he sang with his apostles, "The works of the Lord are faithful and just." The depth of Jesus' love for you that he considered it faithful and just that he be punished in your place!

If you're honest, you really can't understand that. If that bores you, God help you. That's what we have to get closer to. When we are going through those things where we say, "I don't feel real thankful," that's who we have to get closer to.

Right now, today, I'm struggling with saying thank you Lord. Our Staffing Committee pours all this time and energy into its work and brings its recommendations before the congregation today. We have it in the time of Bible class so that people can hear it between the services so we can teach what our ministry is and things like that so we can grow in our faith. Less people than are usually at both Bible classes were there. It's a struggle to say thank you Lord for the people that were there, and that's what I need to do. But when you see all the things God has blessed us with, and you see all the things we can be doing, and you see all these blessings that we have that God has

showered on us, you just want more and more people to have them. When it seems as though we aren't interested in it, it's hard to say thank you Lord. But in some way, in some shape, in some form, the Lord will work good out of it, and the Lord will continue to bless us.

So, as you go forward and you're facing those things where you are saying, "I don't know Lord. How can I remain thankful?", the only thing we can do is get closer to Jesus and see this incredible love he has for each and every one of us and be reminded again of how important it is to share that love with each other and with the world. Amen.