

Thanksgiving – 2011

"Look Before You Weep"

Text: 1 Timothy 6:6-17

Grace, mercy and peace – certainly three of God's greatest gifts to mankind – be multiplied to each of you as you give thanks to your Savior God for his innumerable blessings on this Thanksgiving Eve. Amen.

Dear Fellow Recipients of God's unlimited generosity:

Our text for this special service of thanksgiving is found in Paul's First Letter to Timothy, the Sixth Chapter:

ESV 1 Timothy 6:6-17 Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. ¹¹ ¶ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, ¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time--he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. ¹⁷ ¶ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

These are the very words of God. They are thus, in and of themselves, precious *gifts* that we never want to take for granted. To help prepare our hearts for the study of these words, and to remind us of their divine origin, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

A man stands precariously on the very edge of the roof of his downtown office building and watches the cars pass on the street 75 stories below – almost ant-like from this height. His intention is to join them there as quickly as possible and to thereby put an end to the misery that is – so he has convinced himself – his current life. Vaguely, however, he hears the voice of his friend, begging him, pleading with him to step back and talk things over. His friend was actually telling him exactly what he expected him to say at a time like this – trying to point out all the good things in life and just how much he still has to live for.

Now imagine that you are with a growing crowd that is gathering on the sidewalk below, waiting to see how the drama will unfold. You know the man, work with him in fact, but you aren't particularly close. Unexpectedly a police officer taps you on the shoulder, asks your name, and then tells you to follow him. Evidently the man on the roof is asking for you and wants to talk to you. Again, you're not particularly close, so the only thing that you can think on the way up in the elevator is that he remembers that you are a Christian and wants to hear your perspective on the situation. So what do you tell him? What do you say to a man who is contemplating something as terrible and God-displeasing as suicide? Clearly you will want to give him the law and explain what a terrible thing it is to walk knowingly and willfully into any sin – especially when that sin will end your time of grace – but how do you go about trying to change the man's attitude and outlook? How do you get him to recognize that things really aren't as bad as they seem?

Again, the best counsel that the world can offer at such times is actually based on greed: *Don't end your life because you can still get more out of it.* That's actually the bottom line with most folks, isn't it? *"Don't end your life because there is still more good stuff to be gained."*

Here again Christians should and do see life differently. A truly thankful heart doesn't look forward; it looks backwards. There is and should be trust that God will continue to care for his children, but that really doesn't help someone who neither knows nor trusts God's promises. What does help is to honestly evaluate all the good things that *are* yours, all the good things that *have already been given to you.*

So what would I tell the man on the ledge? First, how great and how eternally dangerous is the sin he is contemplating, but, second, *"look before you leap."* Bear with me here.

This is, in fact, exactly why we bring up something like this on this Thanksgiving Eve. It is part of what we hope to accomplish this evening – to give thanks to our God for the "done deals" of this life, and thereby to learn to truly trust him with our temporal and eternal futures going forward, even when things look very, very bleak. Obviously that is going to require some thought and explanation if we are really going to get how this all works.

There are basically two different ways for each human being to live his life – with optimism based on the good things of the past and the promise of our God, or with pessimism that the great life that we now enjoy will not continue. Our text describes the first frame of mind with these words: ***Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.*** Our text also describes the second frame of mind (the pessimistic, anxious outlook) with these words: ***But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.***

Our God doesn't leave it to our imagination which frame of mind he would have us adopt as our own. Our text goes on: ***"But as for you, O man of God, flee these things (the lust for wealth). Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*** God has not called us to pessimism and anxiety but to optimism and contentment – and to a higher, deeper relationship with him.

The connection between these things is not always readily apparent. It takes some thought and work to connect things like optimism with contentment. This evening we will seek to make those connections – between optimism and contentment on the one hand, and pessimism and lack of contentment on the other. This is an important study, since our quality of life (the quality of our time of grace here in time) usually hangs in the balance.

Every single person here this evening can list countless examples of "done deals" in your lives that lend themselves to an ongoing sense of optimism going forward. By "done deal" we mean those things that have

already been given to us – blessings that we have already been received. A partial list would include your faith, your spouse, your children, parents, house, standard of living, creature comforts, plethora of luxuries, toys (for young and old) and the like. It can be something as simple as the fish or deer that didn't get away, or the unbelievable sale you got on that appliance that had to be replaced on short notice, to something as big as the fact that you have never known a day in your entire life when you didn't have enough to eat. Obviously this is but a tiny fraction of all that God has done for us, but you get the point.

Yet since true thanksgiving is about the blessings of the past, how does an evaluation of what God has done in the past help to comfort us concerning the future?

In Psalm 77 (one of the Psalms we recently studied in our Wednesday Bible Class) the Psalmist told of his depression at the current state of affairs in his life and of his pessimism regarding the future. Can you guess what changed his attitude? Hear his solution in his own words: ***"Then I said, 'I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High. ¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. ¹² I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.'" Psalm 77:10-12*** His solution was to take a backwards look at what God has done in the past. The obvious lesson that he re-learned was that the God who did such great things in the past could obviously be trusted to care for him also in the future.

So also with you and me. Whenever we find ourselves caught up in a pessimistic or depressed world-view, we would do well to ask ourselves, ***"What has God ever done in the past to deserve such pessimism from us? When has our God ever demonstrated a lack of love toward us? When has he ever failed to provide us even more than we need? When has he ever let us down?"***

It is, unfortunately, typical of sinful mankind to look at all that we have been given and to lightly pass it off with an *"Oh that"* and then to follow it up immediately with a *"But what about...?"* – pointing to something that we "lack." Yet understanding that our God is our loving, wise Good Shepherd, the denials of the past are themselves examples of blessings for which we owe him our thanks. Who here wasn't denied something as a child that would almost certainly have been very bad for you? What parent here hasn't done the same for your own children? We should expect no less from our Heavenly Father. You and I will never know all of the ways our God protected us from unseen

dangers (both temporal and spiritual) by denying us those things that he knew would harm us. Having carried us safely to this point in our lives, all of these unseen and unknown blessings are also done deals; they are in-the-bank good things from our God that can never be taken from us. They are gifts that have already been given by God and received by us.

In fact our God has blessed us so lavishly that one of our greatest issues today is guilt. Shouldn't I feel guilty that I've got it so good? Our text gives perfect guidance here: **"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy."** Our God obviously warns us not to trust in temporal things, but note well the balance that is offered here. God gives us these things **"to enjoy."** There is no sin in enjoying with thanksgiving the blessings of our God. As Christians we know instinctively that there is such a thing as excess, but we often unnecessarily burden our consciences and complicate our lives when we fail simply to enjoy the blessings that our God has given us with a sense of contentment and thanksgiving. That is exactly what we are attempting to do this evening.

Now you want to know the best part? The best part is that we haven't even gotten to the best part yet. So far we've only briefly touched on the here and now; we haven't even begun to talk about the hereafter. Clearly the greatest "done deal" is Jesus Christ, and the forgiveness that he has won for every single human being. Nothing can ever change or undo what Jesus has done. So also our text describes him as **"he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light."** Nothing can make his death on the cross something less than total victory over sin and Satan and the full and complete payment for all of our sins. That is simply an accomplished fact in the eyes of God, and the doubt or denial of the unbelievers doesn't change these divine truths. Truly God has been good to us!

So then back to where we began: what would I tell the man on the ledge? *Look before you leap.* That is, before you take your own life, reexamine all the good things that God has given you and done for you, and be thankful. What should we tell *ourselves* on this Thanksgiving Eve? *Look before you weep.* Before you start to feel sorry for yourself or find yourself focusing on what you don't have or what is unpleasant or hard in your life, look at what you *do* have – and give thanks to God. Amen.

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Thanksgiving Service – November 23, 2011

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#566- *(Red Hymnal)*

"Christ by Heavenly Hosts Adored"

The Confession of Sins and Absolution

The Responsive Reading of Psalm 65 (Selected Verses)

Pastor: O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come.

Congregation: When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.

Pastor: Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts!

Congregation: We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

Pastor: You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior,

Congregation: the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas,

Pastor: who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength,

Congregation: who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.

Pastor: Those living far away fear your wonders;

Congregation: where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy.

Pastor: You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly.

Congregation: The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it.

Pastor: You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops.

Congregation: You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance.

Pastor: The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness.

Congregation: The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing.

Pastor: We give thanks to the Lord our God!

[Sung By All]

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Praise Him, all creatures here below!

Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host!

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

The Prayer of the Day

The Psalm of the Day - Psalm 146, Supplement page 41

The Scripture Lessons:

The First Lesson: ^{ESV} (Luke 17:11-19) On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

**Now thank we all our God With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, In Whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mothers' arms, Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today.**

The Second Lesson: ^{ESV} (1 Timothy 2:1-8) First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

Oh may this bounteous God Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts And blessed peace to cheer us,
And keep us in His grace, And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next.

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#385- (Verses 1-6) *(Red Hymnal)*
"Now I have Found the Firm Foundation"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Timothy 6:6-17
"Look Before You Weep"

The Offertory – [Sung by All]
Supplement Insert, page 16

The Post-Sermon Hymn -#567- *(Red Hymnal)*
"O Lord Whose Bounteous Hand Again"

The Offering [Hymn -#568- (Verses 1 & 3)] *(Red Hymnal)*
"We Praise Thee, O God, Our Redeemer, Creator"

The Thanksgiving Prayer

2 Corinthians 9:6-12 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ ¶ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn

Sung by the Church Choir

Silent Prayer



Thanksgiving



**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Bismarck, North Dakota**