

# Thanksgiving – 2021

## "The 'Why' of Thanksgiving"

Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Grace, mercy and peace – certainly three of God's greatest gifts for which we do well to give thanks – may these gifts 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:

Try a simple experiment sometime, and I guarantee what the result will be. At random, and with no introduction or background, say "Thank you" to someone – family member, friend, co-worker, whomever. How will the person you thank respond? Without question the response will be: "For what?"

It's just a given, isn't it? Thank someone, and they want to know what you are thanking them for. It's also almost universally true that human beings regularly fish for gratitude. They bait their hook with the "why" and dangle it in front of the recipient of their generosity or service. "I'm glad you seem to like the meal. It took me all day to prepare it." "Oh, by the way, I changed the oil in your car yesterday and reset the service engine light." "Mommy, did you like the picture I colored for you?"

Why do we do that? Because from little on we share an almost universal need to be appreciated. Human beings can bear up under a tremendous load and will put up tremendous adversity and hardship when they possess just one thing from those they serve: gratitude. Take that away, and the will to carry on the struggle often goes with it.

Our God also wants to see gratitude in those he blesses, but with God it's different. Where you and I want to experience gratitude from those we serve because it makes *us* feel better, God has no such need or lack. As in all things, God wants to see thankfulness in his children simply because it is the right thing to do and the best way to be. That's probably why we find an interesting fact whenever God in his Word calls for thanksgiving from his children: he almost always gives us the *why*. In other words, he demonstrates to us just exactly *why* grateful is the right way for us to be.

Our text for this special service of thanksgiving is a perfect example of our God giving his people "The 'why' of thanksgiving. That text is found in the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, the 8<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

**ESV Deuteronomy 8:1-10** *"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. <sup>2</sup> And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. <sup>3</sup> And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. <sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. <sup>6</sup> So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. <sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup> a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup> a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. <sup>10</sup> And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.*

This is God's Word. It is thus, in and of itself, a precious *gift* that we never want to take for granted or to receive without thanksgiving. To help prepare our hearts for the study of God's Word, to remind us of its divine origin, and as a reminder to receive his Word with gratitude, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Pretty hard to miss "the 'why' of thanksgiving" in our text for this evening, isn't it? God had just rescued his children from their 400 years of slavery in Egypt and 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. He wasn't bringing the Jews into just another wilderness that they could call their own – one that needed to be tamed and developed. He was giving them prime real-estate that was *move-in ready*. Others had already done all the heavy lifting of taming the

land. What the Jews were about to receive stood in sharp contrast to the wilderness in which they had been wandering for the past four decades. Not only was the land they were receiving rich in potential (good soil, abundant minerals, flowing streams and springs, etc.) the vineyards, the farms, and the groves had already been established. The wells had already been dug. The fortifications, winepresses, and houses had already been built. All they had to do was move in and reap the bounty that the land was already producing.

But there's another "why of thanksgiving" in our text that is as unusual as it is easy to miss. Our God here reminds his children to be thankful for – and because of – his commandments.

This is a bit jarring if we actually stop to think about it. It's easy to recognize the *why of thanksgiving* when someone tells us what they have already done *for* us; it's much harder to recognize when someone is telling us what they are demanding *from* us. Good parents do this all the time with their children, and those children almost universally have a hard time understanding why they should be thankful for what their parents are demanding from them.

Parents are commanded by God to bring up their children **"in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."** (Ephesians 6:4) Wise parents know that this isn't typically the path that children naturally choose on their own. Children have to be trained both to recognize and follow that path. All of us are born selfish and self-centered. That has to be trained out of us. All of us are born with a natural inclination toward laziness and carelessness – which also must be trained out of us. All of us are born with a natural disposition toward entitlement and ingratitude. These, too, parents have to purge.

All of this explains why good parents regularly attach a common label or clause to their commands: *"Just do it. Someday you will thank me for it."*

So it was with God in connection with the Jews, and so also it is with God in his dealings with you and me today. God gave his commandments to the Children of Israel not as an attempt to supply himself with something he lacked but so that he could continue to provide his children with all of the good things that *they* needed. Our text therefore begins with God's own *"Just do it. Someday you will thank me for it"*: **"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers."** The good land that God was taking from its prior inhabitants wasn't taken

from them because of their piety, morality, and godliness; it was taken from them because of their sin, rebellion, and unbelief. God therefore began with a warning to his children that the same would happen to them if they chose to go down that same road.

Clearly the same warning needs to be repeated to the citizens of our own country.

All of us share this common tendency toward evil. Nor is that tendency easily trained out of us. God gave the Jews a generous, behind-the-curtain look at his training techniques in our text when he said to them: ***And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.*** <sup>3</sup> ***And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD... Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.*** <sup>6</sup> ***So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him.***

God knew then, as God knows now, that no matter how great or how seemingly permanent the blessing, man forfeits all when he turns against his Creator. God didn't want this for Israel, which is *why* in our text he gave them the means to avoid that catastrophe. This is, again, his simple: *"Just do it. Someday you will thank me for it."*

God hereby gave the Jews the *"why of thanksgiving"*; *that is, he spelled out for them exactly why they should be thankful.* This is, in fact, anything but rare when we look through the pages of God's Word. Giving the *"why of thanksgiving"* is actually the rule, rather than the exception. Consider just a few of the dozens of examples, starting with our common table prayer: ***Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!*** (1 Chronicles 16:34) So many of the Psalms begin with a simple call for praise and thanksgiving, and the rest of the Psalm gives us the why. Psalm 103:1-5: ***Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!*** <sup>2</sup> ***Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,*** <sup>3</sup> ***who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,*** <sup>4</sup> ***who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,*** <sup>5</sup> ***who satisfies***

**you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.** So also through Paul, the Holy Spirit adds his "why" to the call for thanksgiving: ***"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."*** Then the why: ***"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority."*** (Colossians 2:6-7,9-10) Finally also from our text: ***... You shall bless the LORD your God...*** Why? Because ***"you shall eat and be full, and for the good land he has given you."***

Far from obscure or difficult, we would have to work hard not to see the application in all of this to our own country, our own lives. Their "why" is also our "why": ***For the LORD your God has also brought us into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup> a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup> a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper...*** and silver, and gold, and oil.

God clearly wants to bless his children, but he cannot and will not in the face of continued rebellion, disobedience and thanklessness.

Yet in the face of our sin, disobedience, and rebellion, God also has provided. The greatest "why" of thanksgiving – the most obvious reason to give thanks, now and always – is God's solution to our sin problem. God's greatest gift to mankind is the cross, and the gift of his Son who hung on that cross. We have no greater reason to thank our God than when we consider not what he gives us for our bodies, but for what he has given for our souls. While material gifts will pass away, the gifts that are ours through faith in Jesus Christ never will.

That is our "good land" into which our Savior is leading us. How close each of us stands to the door of that inheritance we cannot know. What we can know, with thanksgiving, is that the God who has given us all of these other things will not now withhold whatever good thing, or whatever discipline, is necessary to finish the job he began and to deliver us safely home.

To that God, our God, we offer our thanks, now and always, and acknowledge with the Apostle Paul in Romans 11 the "why" of our

thanksgiving: ***"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever."*** Amen.

### **Thanksgiving Confession of Faith** (based on the 1<sup>st</sup> Article)

I believe that God has made me and every living thing.  
He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members,  
My reason, and all my senses, and still preserves them.  
He has given me clothing and shoes, food and drink,  
House and home, spouse and children, property and possessions.  
He daily and richly provides me with all that I need to support this body  
and life.  
He protects me from all danger,  
And guards and preserves me from every evil.  
He does all of this out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy,  
Without any merit or worthiness in me.  
For all of this I thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. Amen.

## The Sermon Text:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Deuteronomy 8:1-10** "The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. <sup>2</sup> And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. <sup>3</sup> And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. <sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. <sup>6</sup> So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. <sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup> a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup> a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. <sup>10</sup> And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

### "The 'Why' of Thanksgiving"

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

**The Post-Sermon Hymn** - 425 (Verses 5-6) (Red Hymnal)  
*"All Depends on Our Possessing"*

**The Thanksgiving Confession of Faith** (Projected on screens)

**The Thanksgiving Prayer and the Lord's Prayer**

**The Benediction**

**The Closing Hymn** – 798 (Verses 1 & 4) (Brown Hymnal)  
*"God, We Praise You"*

**Silent Prayer**



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

**Thanksgiving 2021**

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Mark Johnson, President      Angela Pfennig, Organist  
Michael Roehl, Pastor

**Thanksgiving Service – November 25, 2020**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

**The Opening Hymn – 39** *(Red Hymnal)*  
*"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"*

## The Confession of Sins and Absolution

Pastor: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

**Congregation: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Pastor: From the conviction of our hearts, we confess together:

**All: Almighty God, merciful Father, we confess that we were conceived and born with sin. We further confess that we have, since birth, actively sinned against you by our thoughts, words, and actions. We are sorry for our countless sins, and we humble ourselves before your holy presence. Forgive us, for Jesus' sake, and renew us by your Holy Spirit.**

Pastor: God the Father has indeed declared you to be not guilty for Jesus' sake. By his command and according to his authority, I announce to you his divine decree that your sins are forgiven, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**[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 65** *(Projected on Screens)*

## The Scripture Lessons:

**The First Lesson:** <sup>ESV</sup>(1 Timothy 2:1-4) First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

### [Sung By All]

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

### [Sung By All]

**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 - 425** (Verses 1-2, 4) *(Red Hymnal)*  
*"All Depends on Our Possessing"*

