

Thanksgiving Day
November 22, 2007
8:00 & 10:00

O Lord God,
We give you thanks for the awesome beauty and blessings of our island home, the earth. We give you thanks for the abundant resources and plentiful fruits given to us. But most of all Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for sending to us your Son, Jesus, that through Him, we have the promise of eternal life to all believers. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts always be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

The day before Thanksgiving, an elderly man in Phoenix telephoned his son in New York City and said to him, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing; 45 years of misery is enough. We are sick of each other. So call your sister in Chicago and tell her."

Frantically, the son called his sister, who exploded on the phone, "No way are they getting a divorce," she shouted. "I'll take care of this!" She called Phoenix immediately and said to her father, "You are not getting divorced! Don't do a single thing until I get there. I am calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing! Do you hear me?"

The man hung up the phone and turned to his wife, "Okay, honey, the kids are coming home for Thanksgiving, and better yet, they're paying their own air fare!"

Today, families will be gathering together, hopefully to do more than eat a meal, watch football, or make a mad dash to the store. Today offers the perfect opportunity for us to be a grateful people. God wants nothing more than for us to be a people of thanks. That is what sets us apart from the world; makes us different.

Psalm 118, verse 1, reads:

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is **good**; for his loving kindness is everlasting. What greater reason do we need to give thanks to God?

A few years ago, a Peanuts cartoon pictured Charlie Brown bringing out Snoopy's Thanksgiving Day dinner to him. But it was his usual dog food in the bowl. Snoopy took one look at the dog food and said, "This isn't fair. The rest of the world is eating turkey with all the trimmings, and all I get is dog food. Because I am a dog, all I get is dog food." He stood there and stared at his dog food for a moment, and then sighed, "I guess it could be worse. I could be a turkey."

Did you notice that there was little joy in Snoopy's thankfulness? Snoopy's thankfulness was based upon a comparison to others. Snoopy based his thankfulness on the fact that he was better off than the turkey. The lesson to be taken from this cartoon story is that, yes, when we are down in the dumps and full of complaints because life isn't fair, we *ought* to acknowledge that there are so many others far worse off than we are. But when it comes to our own thankfulness, let us not be a Snoopy saying, "Whew! Am I thankful that I am not *her*," or "I am so thankful I don't have to live like *that*."

Being thankful is so much more than a comparison of our own situation to someone else's. Being thankful is so much more than having enough food to eat, a nice warm home to live in, being blessed with good health, or having financial security. Each of those circumstances can be taken away from us in an instant. Being thankful ought to become a state of being and a way of life. We usually fail to live in a state of thankfulness because we take our blessings for granted, or worse, as entitlements, a right to have.

Thanksgiving Day ought not to be just a once-a year holiday, but an every day way of life. We are indeed blessed in this nation for the abundance of food and material resources. However, we have taken our prosperity for granted. Robert Lewis Stevenson wrote, "The man who has forgotten to be thankful has fallen asleep in life."

We heard read from the Old Testament this morning God saying to the people of Israel that when you come into the Promised Land and

settle down in your warm homes and have plenty to eat, ... don't forget me. Don't forget to thank me.

I invite you to turn to page 1077, to Paul's first Letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 5, and to verses 16, 17, and 18. I invite you to read with me verses 16, 17, & 18:

15 Rejoice always,
 17 pray without ceasing,
 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Notice please, that verse 18 does not say, "... give thanks for *all* things." But rather, Paul wrote, "**In** all things, give thanks. That, my brothers and sisters in the Lord, is not easy to do. What Paul wrote is one of the most challenging commands in all of scripture. During the first winter in North America, more than half of the Pilgrims that made the journey to the new world, died. Yet, in 1623, Governor Bradford, who lost his wife that first difficult and tragic winter, proclaimed a day to "...listen to ye pastor and render thanks to ye Almighty God for all His blessings." God is saying to us that we are always to be thankful, that in all circumstances, we are always to maintain a humble attitude of gratitude. God's message of us needing to give thanks is so deep, so wide, that it applies to every person / to every area of concern / in every stage of life.

Several housewives were asked to list for what they were especially thankful. They were:

1. "...especially thankful for automatic dishwashers, because they made it possible for them to get out of the kitchen before the family comes back for their after dinner snacks."
2. "... especially thankful for husbands who attack small repair jobs around the house, because they usually make them big enough to call in the professionals."
3. "... especially thankful for children who put away things and clean up after themselves. They are such a joy. You hate to see them go home to their own parents."
4. "... especially thankful for smoke alarms, because they let you know when the turkey is done."

“In all things,” Paul wrote, “give thanks...” This statement is indeed one of the most challenging pieces of scripture. There remains in this world much sadness and strife, hunger and poverty. Yet with God’s help, there will always be that for which we can be thankful, if - in prayer - we seek to find those allusive silver lined blessings.

Permit me to share a personal reflection on Paul’s statement, “In all things, give thanks.” Presently, there is a spiritual war in this country, and more specifically, within the Episcopal Church, a Church I love, and into which I was baptized, confirmed, married, ordained (twice!), my children were married, grandchildren baptized, and from which I hoped to be buried.

Five years ago, a few clergy representing five parishes, were quite troubled with what was seen taking place nationally within the Church. They frequently gathered together for discussion and mutual support. In those early days of dealing with the issues presented to them, spirits were low; an intense state of anxiousness existed. They were witnessing a historic tragedy unfolding before them, one that soon developed into a world-wide spiritual conflict, the over-riding issue being that which questioned the Lordship of Jesus and the authority of Holy Scripture, His Word. However, within this historic tragedy that now has developed into a global event involving primates of every province in the Anglican Communion around the world, a small, but determined body of Christ was formed, a body of Christ pledging to honor the Name and Lordship of the risen Christ, and to honor the authority of His Word and Commandments. The challenges facing this young body of Christ are formidable ones indeed.

Soon, vestries of the like-minded parishes became involved. Within the unfolding tragedy of the fracturing world-wide Anglican Communion, this small, but determined body of Christ, grew. People are coming together, meeting, talking, getting to know one another, and rejoicing in the Lord for such blessings. Men’s and women’s groups met for breakfasts. And as this body of Christ grow in their fellowship with one another, they also grow in the faith once given to the apostles. Their mission, their identity as to who they are in Christ Jesus, has become quite clear: they are disciples of Christ, given the command under His authority and Word to make other disciples.

The spiritual battle in which this body of Christ is enjoined is far from over. The intensity of the battle continues to rise. As in any war, there are very difficult times. Sacrifice is the word of the day. And greater sacrifice may lie in the days ahead. The opposing forces are living the metaphor of ravishing wolves in sheep's clothing. But, as St. Paul wrote, unless subjected to the refiner's fire, to be tested, true value to Christ and His Church will never be achieved. This body of Christ is being tested by the refiner's fire and will continue to be tested so that it may be found worthy to do the work God has given it to do. It is written, "In all things, give thanks."

And the response is, "Yes, thanks *is* given." Thanks is given for the blessings of being tested by the refiner's fire. Thanks is given to be found worthy for the work given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks is given as the numbers of those who consider themselves orthodox traditional believers in the Lordship of Jesus Christ continue to come forward to be made known.

By the grace of God, in the midst of what now may be described as a world-wide spiritual conflict within the Anglican Communion, the believing church will endure, and not only endure, but grow. Thanks be to God! As this tragedy continues to unfold, thanks is given for those whose faith is strengthened. Thanks is given for those who, in these times of trial, stand firm in the faith. Thanks is given for the continuing solidification and strengthening of the traditional orthodox faith. Thanks is given for a faith that increasingly becomes more dynamic in its expression. Yes, "In all things, give thanks."

An outgrowth of our giving thanks to God is peace and joy. I invite you to turn in a Bible to page 541, to Psalm 100:

1 Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

Who is to make a joyful noise?

And to whom is this joyful noise to be given?

2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

We are to worship the Lord with what?

We are to come to Him how?

3 Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

We are to know that the Lord is whom?

Remember the first commandment, "I am the Lord your..."

What? "God"

Who made us?

And not whom?

Whose people are we?

Whose sheep are we?

Therefore, who is our shepherd?

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

We are to come into His presence with what? "Thanksgiving!"

Which means that we are to give Him what? "Thanks!"

And we are to what with His Name? "Bless!"

Remember the third commandment:

"...To not take the Name of the Lord in vain."

Upon close reading of this verse 4 of Psalm 100, we ought to realize that it is not a suggestion, but rather a command.

Why are we to give thanks; why are we to Bless his Name?

Verse 5 gives us the reason...

5 For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

For the Lord is what? "Good..."

His steadfast love endures for how long? "Forever..."

And His faithfulness is given to all what? "Generations..."

You know that includes us, don't you? What an awesome God!

A little boy and his family were having Thanksgiving dinner at his grandma's house. As soon as everyone was seated, the boy started eating right away.

"Tommy, wait until we say a prayer," his mother said. "We always say a prayer before we eat at our house."

"But this is grandma's house," the boy replied, "and she knows how to cook."

A blessed and joyous Thanksgiving Day to you all. And before you dig into your feast later today, do remember the Lord your God who has given you abundant blessings – and give Him thanks. Don't forget Him. He hasn't forgotten you.

Now to God, who is forever Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.