

Give Thanks to the Lord

preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on October 7, 2018

On this special occasion when we pause for a holy day of thanksgiving, let us examine what the Word of God says about giving thanks as we read Psalm 100.

1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. 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. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. 5 For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures for ever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Today as we celebrate thanksgiving we take time to intentionally call to mind the many good things in our lives for which we are grateful. This morning we give thanks for the fact that we are alive, we have a roof over our heads, we have clothes on our back, we have food on our tables, and in most cases lots of good food which we are able to enjoy with family and friends.

In addition to these basics of life, our list of blessings is lengthy. Some things we could add include: the luxury of being able to take hot showers whenever we want, being able to eat any kind of food any time of year, being able to travel all over the world and being able to enjoy a vast array of entertainment that the kings of days gone by could never even dream about. And if these things were not enough, we live in a country where we have free health care and free education. We have nice houses, we own cars, and lots of clothes, and cottages, and boats, and enough junk that we have to have regular yard sales to free up space so we can go fill up our homes again with more things that we really don't need.

Truly, we have been blessed. But, as Scripture reminds us, we have more! In our reading for today we are given several reasons why we should gratefully come before our God singing songs of thanksgiving and praise. And what are these reasons?

For starters, in verse three we are told, "the Lord is God." And by the Lord, which appears in all capital letters in many English translations of the Bible, it means "Yahweh" or "Jehovah" and refers to the specific covenant-keeping God who brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, protected them through the centuries and gave them the promised the Messiah.

This is the Lord who is God. And because the Lord is God, we have good reason to be thankful because it means that we do not live in a world that happened by

accident. Because the Lord is God we do not live in a world that is absent of meaning, direction, or order. Rather, we live in a universe created by a loving God who watches over His creation, cares for it, protects it, and even offers his life in order to redeem it.

As a result, we do not have to worry about trying to control the uncontrollable. We do not need to figure out how to make the sun come up each morning, or how to change the seasons, or how to clothe the lilies of the field. Because the Lord is God, we do not need to take the worries of tomorrow upon ourselves. Because the Lord is God we can be calm when life gets stormy, we can have hope when all else fails. Because the Lord is God we have no reason to fear evil, loss, or death. As the beloved hymn says, "This is my Father's world; oh let me not forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet. This is my Father's world; the battle is not done; Jesus who died shall be satisfied and earth and heaven be one."

A second reason Psalm 100 gives us to be thankful is because the Lord made us. Elaborating on this point the Psalmist writes in Psalm 139 "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

This is grounds for thanksgiving because it means that each and every one of us is a work of art. While those around us may sometimes have difficulty recognizing our God given beauty, and perhaps we ourselves are guilty of selling ourselves short, the fact is that we are the pinnacle of God's creation.

As the opening chapters of the Bible tell us, after God made the heavens and the earth, and all the plants and animals, the angels, and every beautiful thing in all creation, then, God made us in his own image. We are his masterpieces; we are reflections of the living God. Endowed with beauty, dignity, and honour.

This means that we are not impersonal machines made to perform mechanical tasks or blobs of biomass that exist to merely look pretty. As Psalm 100 tells us "we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

This piece of revelation is a further cause of thanksgiving for it identifies the God given source of our health, wealth, significance and happiness. This piece of revelation reminds us of the true riches God has given us which is our relationship with God and our relationship with God's people. "We are his people, the sheep of his pasture." This is what counts in life. After that, everything else is irrelevant.

While this principle is constantly challenged by the voice of our consumer culture that tells us that the deepest needs of our soul will be met by a consumer product, I think we all know from experience that what the Bible says is true. In our hearts we know that we were not made to acquire bigger and better toys. We were not made to invest our lives pursuing power, prestige, and worldly accomplishments. Rather, we were made to love. First God and then our neighbour. This is the whole Bible summed up in a few words. This is our calling and this is our gift. And if we do not embrace it, we will be lost, we will be poor, we will be miserable.

For life is about love. Life is about relationship. As Jesus says, “what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?” What does it profit a person to have a house, but no loving family to make it a home? What does it profit a person to live in a glittering city, but have no loving neighbours to make it a community. What does it profit a person to have access to all the material wealth of this world, and the power and glory that go along with it, but have a heart that is filled with greed, envy, fear, and contempt? It simply doesn't.

That being said, we are all prone to being deceived by the mirage of riches and worldly success. However, as time goes on we learn the truth that the only thing that matters in life is who we love and who loves us. For this is the way God made us. This is the way God ordained for us to find happiness. This is the way God designed for us to find our sense of purpose and significance.

In God's economy, love is the only source of wealth. It has nothing to do with the number of dollars in a person's bank account. Rather, true wealth is only determined by the depth of love in a person's heart. As the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, without love, a person has nothing. But, where love abounds, a person has true riches even if they own little more than the shirt on their back. Where love abounds for God and for our neighbour, there is power, freedom, purpose, significance, and happiness.

These are the gifts God has given to us. As Psalm 100 says, “we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” As the people of God, may we embrace this free gift, may we find the joy it contains, and may we find ourselves truly grateful.

Moving on to the final reason Psalm 100 gives us to be thankful verse five says, “For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” These precepts of our faith; that is the belief that God is good, God is love, and God is trustworthy are amply documented throughout the pages of Scripture. That being said, we also recognize that the daily grind of life

has its way of weakening our faith in these core beliefs. For while there are many good things that are going on in our lives for which we are thankful, we all have our struggles too.

For those of us who are advanced in years we are having real troubles with our health. Many here are also grieving the loss of loved ones and the pain goes deep. And even though the pain eases with time, it never goes away. Continuing with our list of woes, many of us wrestle with loneliness. Others are searching for significance and meaning after life has left us with hopes and dreams that have gone up in smoke.

Again, no matter how good life is going, we all have our problems. And those problems often block our relationship with God. Our problems make us indifferent towards God. Our problems make our heart cold towards God. Our problems make it hard for us to respond to God with grateful hearts.

And this is where the challenge for us lies; to be able to look beyond the troubles of the moment and uphold our conviction that God is good, God is love, God can be trusted and that his mercies last for all generations. On this thanksgiving weekend this is the challenge that is before us.

So even though there is much about God we will not understand in this lifetime, let us make the choice to let God be God and surrender to him the many things of life that are beyond our comprehension. Even though we are bothered by the difficult questions of evil, suffering, judgement, revelation, and the like; let us not let the unanswerable mysteries of life rob of us faith, hope, and charity. Even though we live in a world where we experience good and bad simultaneously let us not let our problems become a barrier to being thankful. And even though we live in a country where we have riches beyond the imagination of previous generations, let us not forget the one from whom all blessings flow.

As we celebrate the holy day of Thanksgiving here at Elmvale (Knox Flos) Presbyterian Church and in our homes with family and friends, let us, shout for joy to the LORD. Let us worship the LORD with gladness; and come before him with joyful songs. May we 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. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. Amen.