

**Lexington Presbyterian Church
Lexington, Virginia**

November 22, 2020

The Basis of Our Thanksgiving

Rev. Dr. Thomas P. Groome III

The 100th Psalm was written for the people of Israel. In essence God was saying to them, “When you come into the Promised Land and settle down in your warm houses and you have plenty to eat . . . do not forget me . . . I led you out of the wilderness and I brought you into a land flowing with milk and honey.”

It doesn't take very long to realize the people of Israel needed a reminder . . . and I am afraid we need one too. Did you notice to whom the Psalm is addressed? Verse 1 says that it is addressed “to all the earth and verse 5 includes “all generations.” This psalm was sung while entering the Temple and was probably done in connection with a thanksgiving ceremony.

The emphasis of the psalm is the Lord. In each verse the Lord's name is mentioned. This is the basis of our thanksgiving—the Lord!!

What do you think of when you think of Thanksgiving? Is it eating, football, long weekend, shopping, history, or family? True . . . thanksgiving is not just a day for food, football, and family. It's not just a holiday every fourth Thursday in November. For God's people, everyday ought to be Thanksgiving Day!

Thanksgiving Day is a distinctive holiday. It doesn't commemorate a battle or anyone's birthday. It is simply a day set aside to express our thanks to God. In 1789, George Washington made a public proclamation saying that, “it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor?” Washington recommended and assigned Thursday, the 26th day of November 1789 to be a day of Thanksgiving.

Of course most know the story of the pilgrims and how they and the Native Americans of the area had a Thanksgiving feast in 1621 – long before Washington's proclamation.

Even earlier than 1621 – we find people offering up thanks to God. In the OT we find a Song of Thanksgiving. It is Psalm 100. It is subtitled “A Psalm of Thanksgiving”. It is an invitation to join together to acknowledge the great things that God has done. Not only does Psalm 100 call us to praise the Lord with thankfulness—it also describes to us the nature of thanksgiving.

In this Psalm we find five key words that describe the essence of thanksgiving. The first word is: JOY—Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth (Psalm 100:1). There is nothing healthier for the soul; more cleaning for the mind . . . there is nothing that makes a human being happier than utterly and completely praising God!

In her classic autobiography *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom tells of a time when she and her sister were forced to take off all their clothes during Nazi inspections at a death camp. Corrie stood in line feeling forsaken and defiled. Suddenly, she remembered that Jesus hung naked on the cross.

Struck with wonder and worship during that seemingly forsaken moment, Corrie leaned forward and whispered to her sister, “Betsie, they took His clothes too.” Betsie gasped and said, “Oh, Corrie, and I never thanked him.”

Thanksgiving does not require bounty—just recognition of what our Savior has done for us.

The second word that describes the essence of thanksgiving is GLADNESS—Worship the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing (Psalms 100:2).

To worship the Lord with gladness is to praise God for God’s power, seen not only in church but throughout a world both wide and wild; to give thanks to God—for benefits and blessings, and also for every moment we draw breath; to express gratitude for God's goodness, for God’s love that is steady as stone, for God’s faithfulness that is never-failing; to serve God through actions and attitudes, living out love of Lord and neighbor in everything we say and do; to treat God like a king, a ruler, an almighty monarch—one who holds our fragile and limited lives within God’s hands.

A few years back a friend sent me a simple little question. Do you know God's phone number? He then told me it's Jeremiah 33:3, 6, 11. It caught my curiosity and I checked out the Scripture reference.

“Call to me and I will answer you; and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known” . . . when they hear about the good things I do for the people of Jerusalem and about the prosperity that I bring to the city and you will hear again the shouts of gladness and joy and the happy sounds of wedding feasts. You will hear people sing as they bring thank offerings to my temple; they will say, 'Give thanks to the Lord Almighty! Because he is good, and his love is eternal.' I will make this land as prosperous as it was before. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

The third word that describes the essence of thanksgiving is DEPENDENCE—Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his (Psalm 100:3).

We are not our own! This is a difficult lesson to hear and to get across in a culture that encourages us to be “self-made” men and women. Most of us seem to believe the popular saying, “It’s my life to live.” Scripture insists, however, that our lives are not simply our own to live. Genuine life is found in dependence upon God. In biblical terms, to live is to praise God and to praise God is to live.

--J. Clinton McCann, Jr. The New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. VI, The Book of Psalms, p. 1079.

We are dependent on God. God created even the air that we breathe. God knows every hair on our heads. God knows every beat of our hearts. We thank God for being God.

The fourth word – is THANKFULNESS—Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise (Psalm 100:4). Thanksgiving is what flows out of a thankful heart.

The Temple symbolized the presence of God. So, whenever the people came into the Temple and entered the courtyards they knew they had come into the presence of God. The place where we meet to worship God is now called a “sanctuary,” indicating that God is here.

In Luke 17 there is a very interesting story. Jesus enters a village and upon entering He finds ten men who were lepers. They stood a long way off and yelled out to Jesus, "Jesus, have mercy on us!" When Jesus saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." They left before they were cured – because the Bible says, "that as they went along, they were cleansed." Only one of the ten when he saw that he was healed, turned around and went back to see Jesus. The man fell down on his face at the feet of Jesus, glorified God and thanked Jesus for what he had done. Only one out of ten thanked Jesus.

That brings us to the fifth word that describes the essence of thanksgiving. It is GRATITUDE—For the Lord is good, his steadfast loves endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations (Psalm 100:5).

The Psalmist gives us 3 reasons to be grateful:

God is good.

God's love endures forever.

God's faithfulness is to all generations.

Henri Nouwen once suggested that the purest, simplest holiday may be Thanksgiving. Christmas is distorted by a society that promotes consumer madness and ritual perfectionism. Even Easter is overshadowed by chocolate bunnies and new finery.

It has been said that gratefulness is the very heart of prayer, and so to truly observe Thanksgiving is to engage in fervent prayer.

Gratefulness, however, cannot be manufactured. It is a grace, a gift that God bestows and not anything we can create in our own hearts. True gratitude bears little resemblance to the forced optimism underlying the admonition to "count your blessings." Gratitude is not a denial of real pain and loss. It is not a stoic effort to concentrate on the good things in life. It isn't the "power of positive thinking."

We cannot attain a state of gratitude by presenting God with a list of things we think we should feel grateful for, but by presenting ourselves and our desire to know God more closely.

--Kris Haig, "Grateful Hearts," Presbyterians Today, November 1999, 7.

I pray that this will be a most meaningful thanksgiving week for all of us! May our hearts overflow with thanksgiving to the Lord as we meditate on God's Word, on God's goodness, on God's love, and on God's faithfulness! May this be the basis of our thanksgiving.

Sources:

The message is from sermons that I preached over the years that I have been in the pastorate. I have compiled them from the notes I made before they were preached. I do not know where I found some of the material contained here. I may have borrowed it, as a whole or in part, from others. I simply do not remember. If this is the case, I apologize right now, and that our combined efforts will glorify God.