

"This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD. The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar! You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Many years ago a woman wrote to Ann Landers, upset because she and her husband had sent a substantial gift for the wedding of their niece but had not heard a word from the couple, either to thank them for the gift or to even acknowledge the gift. Ann had some sage advice: send a note to the bride, noting that since you hadn't heard anything, you are concerned that the gift had not arrived. In this way the woman would be reminding her niece of the importance of those thank-you notes that are so often forgotten or taken for granted in the world today.

How often do we fail to say thank you to others for the things they have done for us? One of my pet peeves comes from the way we often speak our words of thanks. We've all done it. I've done it. You write that thank-you note to a friend and you say something like this: "I would like to thank you for your thoughtfulness", or "I want to express my appreciation for your kindness". To most of us, that probably sounds like a nice thing to say, which is exactly what it is meant to be. But while we are trying to express our appreciation, that isn't really what we say. We mean to say, "Thank you", but if we were to look carefully at our words what we really said was, "we have every desire to thank you, and maybe someday we will actually get around to doing it." Thankfully, most people don't take it that way. They do know what we mean. But if we were trying to be precise in our use of grammar and language, it was the wrong thing to say.

Why make such a big deal about such a simple issue? (You can take me to task over this, if you want!) It is because we often commit this same simple error when it comes to our thanksgiving towards God. We may sing, *"How can I thank You, Lord, For all Your loving-kindness"* (LSB 703, st. 1), but we never get around to actually answering and acting on that question. We *want* to thank God, but we often seem to be like the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane; the spirit is willing to give thanks to God, but the flesh never really gets around to doing it.

Of course, on a day like today, a day dedicated to thanksgiving we may indeed stop and say, "Thank You, Lord, for all your goodness towards us." But why does it seem that we need a special day to remind us to thank the Lord, whose blessings to us are new and wonderful each morning? Our thanksgiving should not be tied to a day. It should not have to be something brought forth in our minds by the displays at the front of the church or in the grocery stores. It should not be something we intend to do, and finally remember to do when the church calendar gives us a special opportunity to do it. Thanksgiving should flow from our hearts, as we remember day by day, with joy and thanksgiving, the wonderful goodness of our God, and in an unending paean of praise for His goodness, say with every ounce of our being, "For all Your lovingkindness, we truly thank You, Lord."

If you want to spend a bit of time on the internet, you could go and check out what thanksgiving meant to most of the people of our world. You will likely find that the majority of sites are American, celebrating the whole idea of the pilgrims and their coming to America. Canadian sites tend to talk about holiday entertaining and recipes, or arts and crafts. Some sites will talk about family traditions and activities, but unless you look at sites tied to churches you will not find very many that specifically mention the idea of giving thanks to God. In case you didn't know our Canadian Thanksgiving heritage, there were Thanksgiving celebrations in Canada as early as 1578, when the English navigator Martin Frobisher held a formal ceremony, in what is now called Newfoundland, to give thanks for surviving the long journey. Other settlers arrived and continued these ceremonies. In 1859, the first national thanksgiving was celebrated, urged by Protestant clergy. The day was intended for the "public and solemn" recognition of God's mercies. Sadly, as historian Peter Stevens has noted, some citizens "objected to this government request, saying it blurred the distinction between church and state that was so important to many Canadians." Eventually in 1879, Parliament declared November 6th a day of Thanksgiving and a national holiday. Over the years many dates were used for Thanksgiving, the most popular being the 3rd Monday in October. After World War I, both Armistice Day and Thanksgiving were celebrated on the Monday of the week in which November 11th occurred. Ten years later, in 1931, the two

days became separate holidays and Armistice Day was renamed Remembrance Day. Finally, on January 31, 1957, Parliament proclaimed: “A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed to be observed on the 2nd Monday in October.”

In our day and age, when any thought of God seems to be discounted by our government, it is hard to believe that it was actually the parliament that thought of thanking God for His bounty. They actually recognized that we have every reason for thanksgiving, and that it is God who deserves our thanks and praise, for it is His goodness that is so evident in the blessings of life we enjoy in this land. But do people today think of giving thanks to Almighty God for His goodness, or is Thanksgiving simply a day to get the family together to acknowledge that we have some good things in our lives, and that we should be grateful for them? For far too many people, there is no thought of thanking God for His goodness. In our Old Testament lesson, Moses reminded the people of Israel that God had blessed them. He had delivered them from their captivity. He provided for them on the journey to the land He promised to give to them. ***“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, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, 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.”*** (Deuteronomy 8:7-9, ESV) And how were the people to respond? ***“And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.”*** (Deuteronomy 8:10, ESV)

But there is a danger that Moses also spoke of in the verses following our Old Testament lesson. He says: ***“Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.”*** (Deuteronomy 8:17-18, ESV) That is also what the psalmist would have us do today. Remember the Lord, the psalmist would say. Think of all the reasons why you should want to thank the Lord—and give Him the thanks and praise that He deserves! ***“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!”***

We cannot begin to comprehend the ways in which our lives would change if we did not have this love of God at work for our good day by day. Yes, there are times and circumstances that make our lives seem less than perfect. There may even be those times when we think life is a living hell. But we have never, ever had to go through even one moment of our lives apart from the gracious care of our heavenly Father. Even in those moments when we have turned our backs on Him to follow after our own sinful pleasures His great love has been at work for our good. Even in those times when we have forgotten Him, He has still been with us to bless us. Even in those moments when we think everything has gone wrong and God has forgotten about us, He has still been there to see us through it all. He is our God, and He cares for us. He is our God, and as the psalmist says, He has made His light to shine upon us.

God's light shining upon us is Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. In this light, God sees us in a new and wonderful way. He does not see us as the sinners we are; sinners who continuously act as if He does not matter in our lives. He does not see us as the selfish people who constantly want more and never seem satisfied with what we have. Nor does He see us as the ungrateful people we so often are, people who take the credit for ourselves that is rightly due to God for His goodness at work in us. In the brightness of this Light, God sees us as His children, as His beloved, redeemed and forgiven children. He sees His Son, who is, in the words of the psalmist, the festal sacrifice, bound with cords and placed on the horns of the altar. Jesus was that sacrifice, paying the price for all of our sins through His death on the cross. That Saviour who died for us has risen and ascends to sit at His Father's side to plead for sinners like you and me. In Christ, the light of forgiveness shines upon us. In the victorious, resurrected Lord, the Light of Life covers us. In this light—through this sacrifice—God declares that we will not die as we deserve, but that we will live in the fulness of life with Him, a life that has more blessings before us than we can even begin to imagine in our wildest dreams.

We have life, salvation and all that God can bestow upon us because He is our God—a good God, whose love for us endures forever. This gives us every reason to want to thank God. But again: do we actually give Him our thanks? We often have been like nine of those ten lepers, pleased to receive the blessings that come from the Lord, and yet never getting around to telling Him and showing Him how grateful we are for His goodness towards us. We are often quick to complain when things aren't going the way we think they should. We are ready to give Him a long list of prayer requests, pouring out our wish list to Him. And yet we often fail to thank Him for His answers to our prayers, answers that are always for the best, even if we don't see it that way.

We don't mean to be ungrateful people. When we stop and think about it, we are grateful for the goodness of our God. But

that gratitude should flow from the hearts of His baptized children day by day, moment by moment, as we rejoice in the love, the grace and the mercy of our heavenly Father which surrounds us and sustains us. Rather than waiting for a Thanksgiving service to finally say, “thank you”, we can live those words day by day, as we walk by faith in Him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light; as we pray and praise the God who has blessed us so richly. “Yes, Lord, we do want to thank you, for your blessings to us, to our families and to our church. But not only do we want to thank you, but we will thank you, with our hearts and hands and voices, praising your name forever and ever.” Amen.