**Deuteronomy 8:1-3,6-10** November 22, 2017

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Thanksgiving Eve

 *Deuteronomy 8:1 Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers. 2Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. 3He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord…*

 *6Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and revering him. 7For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; 8a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; 9a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. 10When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

 Thanksgiving is a kind of a funny day. It says something about human nature that our one day nominally devoted to being thankful for what we have, is followed by the biggest day of the year acquiring what we wish we had. It almost sounds like we are allergic to being thankful! Which perhaps, is not far from the truth.

 While Thanksgiving is kind of a funny day in our society, it is also a kind of funny day in the church year. If you ever page around in the front of your hymnal before church or during the offering, you might have seen those pages entitled, “Lectionary.” On those four pages you find Bible readings for all the Sundays and festivals of the church year – Christmas, Easter, Good Friday, Reformation, even the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost! There is, however, one day of the church year that has no readings listed. Do you know what it is? Thanksgiving. We always have Thanksgiving services, but there are no readings. I don’t know why. But I do have a guess.

 My guess is that this day isn’t “church-y” enough. On Christmas we celebrate Jesus’ birth. On Good Friday we remember his death for us. On Easter we remember how he rose from the dead. But Thanksgiving? What do we remember? Pilgrims and turkeys? Food? Thanksgiving does not commemorate something about our salvation. And the date we use for Thanksgiving was not determined by God or a Pope or a churchman, but by a US president. I mean, how “un-church-y” can a day be and you still get people through the church doors?

 So sometimes we try to dress up Thanksgiving for church by talking mostly about God’s spiritual gifts. Which isn’t wrong, but it points out that we feel a little uncomfortable about being happy about earthly things, because they are, you know, earthly things.

 But when Jesus taught us how to pray, do remember how he taught us? *“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* And then he said, *“And give us this day our daily bread…”* That doesn’t go with the rest. The rest of the Lord’s Prayer is about spiritual things: about God and heaven and faith. But when Jesus taught the Lord’s Prayer, he said that prayer is not just about spiritual things. Spiritual things are, to be sure, more important. But God is concerned about our physical well-being. And if Jesus himself took 1/8 of the most perfect prayer he could teach us and devoted it to physical needs, then perhaps it is right to reserve one day of the year, to thank God for physical blessings! We cannot and would not want to ignore God’s spiritual blessings. But that is not the focus of Thanksgiving.

**I. Trust Him in Adversity**

 In our reading from Deuteronomy today, through Moses God points Israel to truths which they more than knew, which they had lived. These were Israelites who had seen Moses with their own eyes. They had walked the Sinai Desert for decades. They had seen the fiery serpents, and the one bronze serpent on the pole. To them Moses said, ***“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years.”***

 Now at the end, Moses says, ***“Remember how the Lord… humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna.”*** God had brought them to the edge of starvation and then fed them. Which right there, tells us something about Thanksgiving

 Shortly after we moved back to America, I wrote an email to friends back in Malawi saying that we were thankful that God had blessed us with a good trip. And one of the missionaries wrote, “God answers prayers. But we are always more thankful when he gives us what we want, right?” Touché. He had a point. It’s not just when I like what God is doing that he is blessing me. He always is!

 Or listen to George Matheson. George Matheson was a blind pastor in Scotland about a hundred years ago. This blind pastor said: “My God, I have never thanked Thee for my ‘thorn!’ I have thanked Thee a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my ‘thorn;’ I have been looking forward to a world where I shall get compensation for my cross… Teach me the glory of my cross; teach me the value of my ‘thorn.’”[[1]](#footnote-1)

 The Israelites had their thorns out there in the desert. Their thorns—their hunger, their thirst, their wanderings—taught them to be thankful. The Lord fed them manna. It was a miracle, literally food from heaven. God had used their suffering as a way to bless them. From then on in the desert, they ate this manna, a daily reminder that God provided for them. In fact, they still were eating it at the time of our reading and for a few more days until they entered the Promised Land. It was a miracle. They did not raise wheat or grind it. They did not cut wood to bake it. But there it was for them morning after morning.

 It was not only a lesson of God’s providence, but that every adversity is a time when God teaches us to grow in faith! The Lord provided in this way, ***“to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”*** Be certain and be thankful that God will even work through adversity to keep us close to him.

**II. Trust Him in Prosperity**

 In Deuteronomy Moses said that the lesson of miraculous manna would not always be with them. God promised Israel a beautiful and blessed land, or what God calls in divine understatement ***“a good land.”***

 The first thing God says about the land is that it has water. The Israelites had been wandering in the desert for forty years. The Sinai peninsula covers about ½ the area of Kentucky. There is not a single river, not a single stream in that expanse. We really can’t even imagine it. It averages less than 2” of rain a year. These people had never seen any amount of water except for the salty Red Sea. The fresh water they got, came out of wells they couldn’t see the bottom of. When the Lord spoke of ***“a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys”*** he described something that must have sounded like heaven.

 Then he went on to describe more about the “good land.” ***“A land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey.”***

 God was telling them that while, for the moment, they could see God’s obvious care in the daily shower of manna, it would not always be that way. In the new land God speaks of no miracles. No manna from heaven, no water from a rock. Just wheat and fruit trees, a land with water and green grass for herds and flocks, like how *we* survive.

 That is how God, for the most part, took care of them and us. We might think that God is only taking care of us when he does something so amazing that we can’t explain it. But here God reminds us that even the things we think we can explain and understand, these too come from God.

 God gave us the strength and the smarts to work. He created this earth that yields grain and fruit. He gave us our places in the world. Therefore we are right to thank God for all that we have, not only in adversity, but also in prosperity. We do not go too far when we thank God for the pumpkins or blueberries we grow out back. We do not go too far when we thank God for the paycheck from the government or the factory. All of these are God’s giving. We should thank God, even when we are quite sure of our own achievements and can sit down and compare how we outperformed someone else by working harder or making better decisions or being less wasteful or whatever. It is still God who gives us every good blessing. Be not proud! Moses had to remind the Israelites to be thankful in a new land where things would *not* happen as miraculously as manna, *but* as naturally as rain, ***“Praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.”***

 Yes, praise the Lord. Thank the Lord. Repent of unthankfulness and indifference. And give him credit for all he provides.

 *“Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”* (Psalm 103:2-5). Amen.

1. Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 1456). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)