

**Thanksgiving – November 24, 2010**  
**Faith Lutheran Church, Pastor Paul Horn**

After a childhood spent in the home of his father, a poor coppersmith, Martin Rinkart found an outlet for his skills as a singer and composer as the choir director in the well-known St. Thomas Church of Leipzig, Germany. While there, he worked his way through the University of Leipzig until he earned his degree and was ordained as a minister in the Lutheran church. He was thirty-one.

Pastor Martin Rinkart was assigned to be a pastor in his hometown of Eilenburg, a province of Saxony. It was the year 1617. The religious turmoil that was born in the Reformation swept across the European Continent. War broke out and for the next thirty years the German cities and countryside were ravaged.

Eilenburg was a walled city, a place of refuge and safety for the thousands fleeing the attacks of the armies during the Thirty Years' War. Overcrowded and under-supplied with food, sanitary facilities and medical care, the walled city became a city of death. Plague and pestilence raged through the crowded streets and homes claiming hundreds of victims. During the three decades of devastation, Rinkart had to endure the quartering of soldiers in his house, the frequent plundering of his little stock of grain and household goods.

Then the plague of 1637 visited Eilenburg with extraordinary severity. In one year 8,000 people died. The other pastors of the town had died or fled and Rinkart was left alone to bury over 4,000 men, women, and children, sometimes conducting 45 funerals a day. He even buried his beloved wife. But Pastor Rinkart was a model to his parishioners, dutifully at the beds of the sick and dying.

After all this suffering the Swedish army occupied Eilenburg and the general demanded the citizens to pay a large sum of money in tribute. On behalf of Eilenburg's destitute townspeople, Reverend Rinkart spoke to the general, begging for a reduction, since there was no way the money could be paid. The general was angry and unmoved by Rinkart's pleas. Facing possible death, Rinkart turned to the townspeople who had followed him and said, "Come, my children, we can find no mercy with this man: let us take refuge with God." He fell on his knees, led them in prayer and the singing a familiar hymn. Stunned, the Swedish general watched in silence. When Rinkart rose from his knees, the general instructed that the levy be reduced, and he spared the city any further trouble.

In spite of all the difficulties and losses that Pastor Martin Rinkart faced in his life, he wrote one of the greatest Lutheran thanksgiving hymns, "Nun danket alle Gott" (Now Thank We All Our God). Consider all that he endured and yet he wrote, "Oh, may this bounteous God through all our life be near us. With ever-joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us, and keep us in his grace and guide us when perplexed, and free us from all ills in this world and the next." Pastor Martin Rinkart had learned, like the apostle Paul, that nothing in life or death could separate him from the love of God which God had shown in his Son, Christ Jesus.

Bed bugs are becoming an epidemic. Sinus infections drag many away from work and family this time of year. Property taxes are due at the end of the month. Your drain is clogged. You can't unplug it yourself and you now have an unexpected plumber bill. There's irrational drama in the family. The little inconveniences in life, but they add up. And then... AIDS kills almost 5,000 people a day. Many more than 8,000 in a year, wouldn't you say? Cancer claimed the lives of 24,000 people last year. There were over 30,000 motor vehicle traffic crashes which were fatal in 2009. I know my day is coming someday, maybe soon. I'm surrounded like the Germans in Eilenburg. There's death outside the city walls and danger within. It seems that I cannot escape it.

I know that I will suffer in this life. And it because of sin. Sin destroys everything good in this world. Sin causes tension in my relationships, even in my own family. Sin corrupts my body and brings sickness and disease. Sin takes away the life of my loved ones causing me pain and sorrow. Sin comes and makes heavy demands that burden my soul, more than I can bear. Sin will eventually take my own body to the grave. More depressing, sin ruins my relationship with my God, it cuts me off from him forever.

And yet, although I stand in the midst of pestilence and plague, war and death, I can sing, "Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices, who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices, who from our mother's arms has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love and still is ours today."

Why can you or I or anyone sing thanks to God at a time like this? As Pastor Rinkart wrote, he has freed us "from all ills in this world and the next." God has done "wondrous things." For all of the horrible, awful things that sin does, it cannot undo what Christ Jesus did for me and for you and for the whole world. Jesus took sin in himself, your sin, the sin of the world, and destroyed sin in himself when he died on the cross. Jesus took in himself all of sin's horrible consequences by the cross; suffering, the wrath of God, the fires of hell, and even death. By his death, Jesus took away all of sin's power. Through faith in Jesus, by trusting in him as your Savior, your sin has been pardoned by God. Even though sin wreaks havoc in this life, in the end, you have already won. Even though we will face the grave, we have already won. Christ Jesus destroyed the power of sin, which is death, by rising from the grave. For us who believe in his death and resurrection, we have hope. We have confidence. We have eternal life in heaven.

When we are surrounded by the reality of our many sins and transgressions, you and I will sing, "Now thank we all our God," for it is he who has rescued us from death, and from it's cause, my many sins and transgressions. We will sing, "Now thank we all our God," for it is he who won the victory over our death. When we are surrounded by death and disease, sorrow and pain, suffering and grief, in every circumstance of life, we will sing thanks to God.

Listen now to the words of God from Psalm 91.

<sup>1</sup> Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." <sup>3</sup> Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. <sup>5</sup> You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, <sup>6</sup> nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. <sup>7</sup> A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. <sup>8</sup> You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. <sup>9</sup> If you make the Most High your dwelling, even the LORD, who is my refuge, then <sup>10</sup> no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. <sup>11</sup> For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; <sup>12</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. <sup>14</sup> "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. <sup>15</sup> He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. <sup>16</sup> With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

This is the Word of the LORD.