

A psalm. For giving thanks.

- ¹ *Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.*
² *Worship the LORD with gladness;
 come before him with joyful songs.*
³ *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.*
⁴ *Enter his gates with thanksgiving
 and his courts with praise;
 give thanks to him and praise his name.*
⁵ *For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
 his faithfulness continues through all generations. (Psalm 100)*

Why Give Thanks?

“What do you say?” Have you ever spoken those words? What answer did you expect to hear from your child or your grandchild? “Thank you,” right? We all teach our children to say thank you. And I know that you do, because I often hear it from your children. In fact, I have a couple of kids in my catechism class who come up to me to recite the memory work that I assigned them and when they’re done, they always say “thank you” to me, the person that made them memorize and recite those things. It always surprises me, a little, but in a very nice way. Why do we teach our kids to say thank you? To be polite? To be nice? To help them get ahead in the world? I’m sure all those things are true. But there’s something else that should be happening in our minds and hearts when we take the trouble to do this: saying thank you is the right thing to do. When someone does something for you or gives something to you because they love you, a thank you shows that you appreciate what they’ve done or what they’ve given. Gratitude is more than just good manners. It’s God pleasing. Tonight, we’ve gathered to begin our Thanksgiving celebration. This holiday exists as an opportunity to express our real gratitude to our God who has done everything for us. So this evening, we want to meditate for a few minutes on why we have a holiday like this at all, and even more importantly, why thanksgiving should be a way of life for us. **Why give thanks?**

I.

Obviously, when we say thank you, something has been given to us or done for us. This evening, we want to remember the greatest gifts we have been given. Psalm 100 points out several of those gifts. It points to who we are, by the grace of God. **Why give thanks? Because we are God’s people.**

The psalm begins with a call to thanksgiving. It says, **“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.”** There’s more than one way to say thank you. Those shouts and songs of praise are indeed a form of thanking God. And why? The psalm says, **“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.”** God made us. We belong to him. Now, today, that might not seem like such a great thing. After all, we Americans believe in freedom. Belonging to someone sounds like slavery. Yet, the truth is, we all do belong to someone. We husbands belong to our wives, and to no other woman. You wives belong to your husbands and to no other man. I often speak of *my* children and I hope they think of Becky and me as *their* parents. To belong to someone can mean much more than slavery.

When it comes to our relationship with God, it means recognizing that he made us. Now, admittedly, we didn’t ask him to do that. But he chose to make us so that he could love us. In that sense, the whole world belongs to God and owes him a big thank you. God is the creator of all that exists. But this song of praise doesn’t just remind us of that day when God said, “Let there be light.” In a very real way, God created each and every one of us. He worked through our parents and the biological process of conception and through the doctors and nurses and prenatal and perinatal care. He worked through generations of people who went before us going all the way back to Adam and Eve. But God made us. Not one of us would be here without his

express command. And we are the people that we are because of his creating love. He taught us. He gave us faith. He gave us gifts and experiences, joys and even sorrows along the way so that we live and worship here in his house today.

We may not always appreciate the people that we are. We may wish that we were more attractive or smarter or more gifted or more popular. We might envy other people's parents and opportunities. We might wish that our lives were so much different than they really are. But God made us. We are the people he created. His love brought us to this point in our lives. And the greatest work of his love is to make us his people, the sheep of his pasture.

What does that mean? The Bible is full of sheep and shepherd metaphors because the Jewish people raised sheep and it all was meaningful to them. We could spend a lot of time this evening exploring what sheep were like and why they needed shepherds – they were helpless without them. They were valuable to the shepherd and he kept them safe and well fed and happy. All that is true about God's relationship with us. But tonight, we want to especially focus on what it means that we are his sheep and not someone else's. We have the Good Shepherd, Jesus.

We are his people, the sheep of his pasture means that we have faith in Christ. We don't belong to the devil anymore. We all did when we were born. Sin claimed the heart of every person who was born here, except one. Left to ourselves, we would still be the devil's sheep. We would never even know there was another flock to belong to. We would sin and sin again and feel guilty and even afraid, but that would be the only way of life available to us. All we could do would be to try to talk or drink or party ourselves out of that guilt or invent good works to try and balance all our sins. All we could do would be to try to find some way to feel like all that guilt and sin were gone. And while we might convince ourselves, we would never really free ourselves from the devil and we would die and go to hell.

But God changed all that. Before the world began, he had a plan to set us free. And he chose us to be his people, his sheep. For thousands of years, he guided the world's history until a baby was born in Bethlehem. That child grew up to be our Saviour. Jesus walked this earth in love and perfection. Jesus lived for God in a way that none of us can. Then he died on the cross. On the third day, he rose. Because he was more than just a Jewish baby, because he was God's only begotten Son, when he did those things, he erased our sin. He gave us his holiness. Then when the time was right, we were baptized, we heard the good news in church or Sunday school or from our own parents, and through that gospel God gave us faith. God moved us into his flock. God made us his people.

Today, that means that we are on the way to heaven. It means that this world is not all that there is for us. The sorrows, the hardships, the disappointments and the difficulties will all end one day soon. Christ will return and he will remake this world and we will live with him in eternal joy. That is our greatest gift. The only proper response for us is to say thank you today and every day of our lives here and every day that we spend in eternity.

II.

Forever is the point of our thanksgiving. When I was growing up, I remember our pastors harping on the idea that it's not about one day of thanksgiving but about a life of thanks living. I always thought that was kind of a cheap pun, but apparently it worked, because I still remember it all these years later. We celebrate Thanksgiving once a year, but God's love transcends a one day holiday. So should our thanks. **Why give thanks? Because God's love endures forever.**

The psalm says, "**For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.**" Does that sound a little like the second part of our Lutheran table prayer? "O give thanks unto the LORD for he is good. His mercy endures forever." That actually comes from a different psalm. But the idea echoes throughout the book of psalms. We give thanks because God is good. What does that mean? Obviously, it means that there is no evil in God. He is holy and righteous. He's the definition of what it means to be good. He's the standard we measure everything against. But it also means that he is good to us. All that he does in our lives he does because he loves us. All of it brings blessing to us.

Tomorrow, most of us are going to gather with family or friends and eat a big meal and maybe even watch a little football. Hopefully, all of us will recognize that the meal and the family and the TV we watch the game on are all blessings that come from the LORD who is good. Some of us might shake our heads a little at that image, because we're aren't going to have a Hallmark holiday. Some of us don't live close enough to

family to have that big family get together. Some of our families are torn by hurtful history or deep sadness, and the holidays are hard. But no matter what intrudes into your life and makes your holidays less than perfect, the LORD is good. Even the hurt that he allows to come to us serves to bless us. He uses it all to perfect our faith and to keep us on the road to heaven. When we get there, we will see that he has only been good to us.

God's love endures forever. His faithfulness continues for all generations. There is no place in this world where we can go that God's love does not find us. No matter how unfaithful we have been or will be, God will always want us to return to him. Nothing can kill his love. Nothing can change his promises. God promises that in Christ all our sin is gone. God promises that we are his people. God promises that he will walk with us and care for us for all our lives. Trust those promises. And entrust your children to those promises – his faithfulness endures for all generations. The faith that you hear when you kids sing in church is the fulfillment of that truth. God's love will never fail you or your children.

When we know that, then we answer the call of this psalm: **“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.”** When this psalm was written, God's gates and his courts were in a very specific place: the temple in Jerusalem. It was a magnificent worship structure. Today, that building is long gone. But everywhere that God's people gather, we enter his gates and his courts. Everywhere that Christ is proclaimed, everywhere that we see God's love in his day to day care and concern for us, that is God's court. When we come through these doors, we pass through his gates. When we remember his love for us, we praise and thank his name.

And that's as it should be. That's how God ordained our worship. We come before him. We hear his gospel message. We remember his love in Christ and the way that he cares for us every day of our lives and his promises for this life and for the life to come. And we lift up our voices and sing his praise. Then we go out from these courts of the Lord and we live a life of thanksgiving. We praise our God in all that we do and say. Tomorrow, when we gather with extended families or just our nuclear family and we enjoy that special meal, thank God for all his love for us. Amen.