

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Thanksgiving, November 24, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 36, 574:1, 570, 572, 567.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 8:10-18, Philippians 4:10-20, Luke 17:11-19.

Sermon Text: Psalm 36c-7a

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

“O LORD, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love!”

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Thanksgiving Day is a day recognized even by the United States government as a “National Day of Thanksgiving”. But for you, the child of God, “Thanksgiving Day” is more. It is a special day in which you can gather with fellow confessors of Jesus Christ to thank the true God for all his blessings. But even more, every day is a day of special thanks to God, or should be.

In his explanation of the First Article of the Apostolic Creed, Luther teaches us **“I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth. *What does this mean?* I believe that God created me and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities. And I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life. God also preserves me by defending me against all danger, guarding and protecting me from all evil. All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it. For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.”**

In the First Article of faith in the Apostolic Creed and in the Nicene Creed, we learn plainly that (Skip reading the theme, just read the parts.)

THE FIRST ARTICLE

- 1. God created us and**
- 2. God still preserves us.**

God created me and all things. He didn't just wind up a world and then walk away. He created all things in six 24-hour days out of nothing by his almighty Word. All things. The heavens, the earth, all things on and under and above the earth, and man. We accept this by faith and reject all man-made theories of evolution.

Let's look first at the big picture. When God rested on the seventh day, he did not withdraw from the world he had made, letting it run like a wind-up clock, but he has ever since been active every minute day and night in preserving all His creatures. The Psalmist assures us ***“O LORD, you preserve both man and beast.”*** Psalm 36:6 (NIV) By the power of His word he keeps them all in existence. We read in Hebrews that he is ***“sustaining all things by his powerful word.”*** Hebrews 1:3 (NIV). If but for a second he would withdraw his sustaining support, the whole universe would at once sink back into nothing.

Now let's move from the big picture to a very personal picture. God preserves also our individual body and soul, eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason and all our senses, so that each part and system and organ of our body continues to function as he has designed. Without him our mind could not think, our heart could not beat, we could neither move a muscle nor take a step. ***“For in him we live and move and have our being.”*** Acts 17:28 (NIV) We are so completely dependent on him that without him we could not exist a moment. Do we always realize that?

How does God do it? God could preserve us in health and strength without any means whatsoever, as he did Moses on Mount Sinai. ***“Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.”*** Exodus 34:28 (NIV)

But he does not choose to do it that way, and so he gives us those things which we need for the body, such as food, clothing, shelter, family, business and occupation, and property. Through these means God preserves us but he wants us to work for them. Thus he gives us opportunity to work and earn a living, strength and wisdom to do our work, and blesses the labor of our hands. But besides this God gives us many more things, for which we do not work at all; he gives us rain and sunshine and fruitful seasons, he gives us air to breathe and light to see, health of body and of mind, and many other things. These common blessings, so necessary for our well-being, we often do not appreciate until we are deprived of them. We simply take it for granted that we are entitled to them.

How much does God provide? Luther uses the words “richly” and “daily”. He gives us more than we actually need and he does it "daily", as we need it, "in due season" That is obvious from the words of the Psalm which are often used as a table prayer: ***“The eyes of all wait upon Thee; and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”*** Psalm 145:15-16 (KJV)

He usually preserves me by natural means – working to get the food the ground is able to produce and when we work apart from the soil, working to buy what the earth produces. After the great flood, God promised: ***“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”*** Genesis 8:22 (NIV) God also has the ability to preserve me by miracles.

God provides in advance most of the time, and not at the last moment. In a short-term picture, this year he grows the grain from which we get our bread next year. Yet we pray in the Lord’s Prayer “Give us this day our daily bread”. We want to show our reliance on God every day for the blessings of that day. In a long-term picture, God allows us who have a much greater abundance than many people in the world to store up surplus for use long in the future. We should not waste the surplus, but lay it aside, as Joseph did in Egypt. During the years of plenty he provides for the years of shortages or famine. With the Psalmist, we can say ***“I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.”*** Psalm 37:25 (NIV)

So we learn that God still preserves me and all creatures.

How does God preserve you? Here Luther lists clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, cattle, and all my goods. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support my body and life. In all these ways he preserves me. We find abundant examples in the Scriptures of God preserving people, often through miracles.

Consider even how God permits us to set aside some of our earnings for our old age, as through various savings and investment plans, sometimes offered by an employer. Most financial advisors encourage us to set aside adequate and they worry that people aren’t setting aside enough. Yes, we should take advantage of such blessings but not set our heart on them or forget the Lord God who provides them – and all things. For the last 80 years our U. S. Government has withheld a certain percentage of our income for Old Age Benefits, also called “Social Security”. Regardless of any opinions we may have about government or government programs, the United States Social Security System has done a great deal of good for Americans. But remember that behind this way of providing for Americans in old age is God’s hand in providing for mankind. But families must remember that it is first of all their responsibility to provide for parents and grandparents, as we learn when we study the Fourth Commandment. ***“Honor your father and mother, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”***

Yet despite fear that Satan may lead us to have about not having enough to live on, Christ himself said ***“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”*** Matthew 6:31-32 (NIV), We are to trust in the providence of our God ***“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”*** 1 Peter 5:7

Luther adds the words “defend” and “guard” and “protect”. God not only preserves me, he also protects me, keeping evil from me or delivering me from its harm, and by making everything in my life serve for my good. He has many ways of doing this. He provides police and military to protect us in our nation. He protects us personally even with the use of the foremost of his invisible creatures, the good angels to watch over me. In Scripture we find examples such as an angel protecting Daniel from the lions, to warn Joseph of the slaughter that wicked king Herod was planning to kill the baby Jesus, and he delivered Peter from prison with an angel. Look at the beautiful promise God makes especially to believers: **“If you make the Most High your dwelling--even the LORD, who is my refuge – then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.”** Ps. 91:9-10 So why does God do this? What moves God to do all this for you? God does all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. With Jacob we must confess: **“I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant.”** Genesis 32:10 (NIV)

"All this", namely, that God made us and still preserves and governs us, he did and does ‘without any merit or worthiness in me’, that is, I have not earned or deserved it by any work I did. He does not owe us anything, and we may not demand anything of him. There is no personal goodness or moral goodness in us that might possibly induce God to give us all these things. We have not earned them. And so we should not grumble and murmur against him when things in our lives are not to our liking, but be content with whatever God may do for us or to us. Nothing but his goodness and mercy moves God to do all these things for us. Whatever we have and enjoy in life, we should never be proud and boast as though we had achieved it by our own wisdom and strength.

Remember that God’s love and mercy lasts forever – the ‘thousand generations’ of the Conclusion to the Commandments. Look at Psalm 136 in your bibles or in the hymnal, on page 154. Every verse of this psalm ends with **“for his mercy endureth forever”**.

We haven’t even mentioned the greatest of God’s gifts for us – eternal salvation through faith in his Son Jesus Christ. The Second Article speaks especially of this, as we shall hear in greater detail in future sermons. We have also had the Word of God preserved for us in a language we can read and understand! And we also have, to this very day, the opportunity to hear it preached in its truth and purity.

“What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?” Ps. 116:12 (KJV) **“How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?”** (NIV) So how does my heavenly Father want me to show that I appreciate his goodness and mercy to me? Luther teaches: “For all of which it is my duty to thank and to praise, to serve and obey him.”

To Thank God, we should often think of these blessings, recognize them as gifts from God, feel grateful in our hearts, and express this in words. To Praise him, we should speak to others of what God has done for us, and in this way glorify him. We should Serve him in and with our entire lives. Sincere gratitude will show itself not merely in words, but especially in works. We should use what God has given us in his service. We should also Obey him, that is, willingly do what he commands in his Word. We don’t do this with the thought of earning more blessings or of paying for those received, but as an expression of our gratitude.

These great blessings, which according to the First Article God daily showers upon us, we often receive as a matter of course and take for granted. Only when we are deprived of them, lose our health, our eyesight, our hearing, our parents and friends, our home and property, do we realize how much they meant to us. Let us appreciate them while we have them, and thank, praise, serve, and obey him who gave them to us. Luther closes this explanation with the words "This is most certainly true". Because all that we confess in this article is plainly taught in the Bible, I firmly believe it.

May God grant us true thankfulness and appreciation, not only as we celebrate Thanksgiving Day, but every day! Amen.