

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity, November 18, 2018

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 567, 571:5, 575, 572:1-3, 572:4
Lessons: Psalm 104; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11; John 6:24-29
Text: Deuteronomy 4:32-40.
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

One of the common failings we have as human beings is not remembering. We not only make promises to do something and then forget to do it. We take so many things for granted and forget that all our blessings come from the Lord. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer "***Give us this day our daily bread.***" Matthew 6:11. (KJV) But how often do we give serious thought to the fact that food, clothing and shelter, good health, and all the necessities of this life, are daily gifts from God? Do we give thanks when we sit at the table and eat? Do we teach our children to do this? In these last evil days, are we thankful for the precious gift of God's Word and the fact that we have the true teachings of God's Word?

As we approach Thanksgiving Day, let us be reminded of God's many blessings, as we learn

WHAT A THANKFUL CHRISTIAN SHOULD REMEMBER.

1. **To praise the great goodness of Almighty God;**
2. **To serve the one true God according to his commandments so that we may receive his blessings.**

Our text speaks of the history of Israel as Moses recorded it by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We are reminded of the great goodness of Almighty God as we hear what great things God did for his chosen people of Israel. God wanted to emphasize that he did something for Israel that was outstanding. "***Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of?***" Moses asked the people of Israel to search the records of the world's history. They could ask all over the earth to try to find the answer to this question: Had anything ever happened since the creation of the world that could begin to compare with the goodness of God toward Israel? Moses wanted the people to understand that God had singled them out for unusual manifestations of his goodness and kindness.

Moses cited examples from the history of Israel, beginning with the time when the Ten Commandments were given on Mt. Sinai. "***Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived?***" At Mt. Sinai God showed his power and glory in the fire, the thunder and lightning, and the piercing sound of trumpets. No other nation on earth saw the glory of God in this way. But Israel did, and yet they were able to endure this and not die. There on Mt. Sinai God gave his Ten Commandments exclusively to Israel. Moses refers to this occasion when he says, "***From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, and you heard his words from out of the fire.***" God spoke from heaven and the Israelites on earth heard him. "***Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.***" Ex. 19.

God's great goodness was seen when he delivered them out of slavery in Egypt. "***Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by***

war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?" The people of Israel were in Egypt for 430 years. They were slaves living in oppression because of the cruelty of Pharaoh. God wanted to deliver his people from their bondage and he had Moses and Aaron speak to Pharaoh about letting the people go. When Pharaoh did not listen and let the people leave Egypt, God showed his almighty power in plagues that afflicted the Egyptians. The water in the rivers, ponds and pools was turned to blood and the Egyptians could not drink it. Frogs were made to cover the whole land and cluttered their houses. Lice afflicted man and beast, swarms of flies came next, and then a serious disease afflicted all the cattle in the form of boils. Then the Lord sent hail and thunder and lightning to destroy all the crops. After that locusts in huge swarms destroyed anything that was left. This was followed by thick, black darkness for three days. Finally all the firstborn children in Egypt and all the firstborn of the cattle were killed. The plagues did not affect Israel. Then Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron that the Israelites could leave, and the Egyptian people urged them to leave because they were afraid they would all die. When the Israelites were leaving, Pharaoh again became stubborn and sent his soldiers and chariots to prevent Israel from leaving. When the people of Israel were about to cross over the Red Sea, they were frightened and Moses told them, ***"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today."*** Exodus 14:13. The Lord then performed the great miracle of dividing the waters of the Red Sea so that the people could pass over on dry ground. The Egyptians who followed them were all drowned. ***"There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds,"*** Exodus 13:37-38. By this series of miracles God showed his almighty power and his great goodness to his chosen people of Israel.

After God had delivered the Israelites from Egypt, he miraculously sustained them for 40 years as they passed through the desert on the way to Canaan, the Promised Land. God gave the land of Canaan to them as their own land, driving out the heathen nations before them. Why did God do this? What was his purpose? Our text answers, ***"You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other."*** The people were to learn and remember that the Lord God Almighty is the one true God. All other gods like the heathen god Baal that the heathen nations in Canaan worshiped, are only the figments of heathen people's imagination. What a lesson for us today, as the Muslims proclaim that Allah is God. Muslims outnumber Christians in the world and they deny that Jesus is the Savior of the world and the Son of God. They say that God has no Son, and many Muslims are violently opposed to believers in Christ.

There was another purpose that God had in doing all this for the Israelites. Moses refers to this in our text. ***"Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today."*** Of special importance is the reference to God's love for the Israelites' forefathers. Their forefathers were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To Abraham first was given the promise of the coming Messiah. On the occasion of Abraham being willing to offer up his only Son Isaac, God told him, ***"Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."*** Genesis 22:18. This was God's purpose in showing his great goodness to the people in delivering them out of Egypt and giving them the Promised Land as their own. This was all a part of God's plan of fulfilling his promise of the Messiah who would be the Savior of the entire world. Of him the Bible says, ***"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved,"*** Acts 4:12.

Today, and every day, we should indeed remember the goodness of Almighty God in providing for us all the necessities of life. Our material blessings in our land far exceed those in most other lands in the world. Let us remember this and acknowledge this truth. ***"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing."*** Psalm 145:15-16.

However, more important than material blessings are the spiritual blessings God has given us. He has made us members of his kingdom. That means we have been brought under his rule in the Holy Christian Church. He has preserved the true Gospel of our Lord and Savior to us. There is nothing commonplace about this blessing. While most of the world and most of the churches in our land have lost this blessing of the true Gospel of Christ, we still enjoy it freely and bountifully. We still hear the message of what God has done for us

in Christ, namely ***“that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:19. There is no greater blessing than to know Jesus as our Savior and to trust in him for salvation. Surely we today should join our fellow believers in saying, ***“Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.”*** Psalm 105:1-2.

Another thing a thankful Christian should remember is **to serve the one true God according to his commandments so that we may receive his blessings.**

2.

In this season that includes Thanksgiving Day we especially should acknowledge the Lord’s great goodness. Our text says, ***“Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.”*** We should acknowledge and confess the one true God, the Triune God. In the words of the hymn writer we should confess,

“Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea.

Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!

God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!” (The Lutheran Hymnal 246:4)

Our text now tells us how we can acknowledge the true God and show our thankfulness. ***“Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today.”*** Moses told the people of Israel that they could show their thankfulness to God by keeping his commandments and statutes. They were to worship the Lord alone and not go after other gods or worship idols like the heathen did. So we who claim the name Christian should show that we are sincerely thankful for all the Lord has done for us by keeping his commandments. We are privileged people in that we know God’s commandments in his holy Word. We also know that God did not give us his commandments so that we should try to earn our salvation by keeping them. Jesus kept all the Law of God perfectly for us as our Divine Substitute. Jesus told his disciples, ***“I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”*** John 14:31. Jesus ***“humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.”*** Philippians 2:8. The precious message of the Gospel is that ***“through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”*** Romans 5:19. God has declared us righteous for Jesus’ sake. Since we have been brought to faith in Jesus and believe that we are justified by God’s undeserved love and mercy, we surely should show our thankfulness and serve the Lord by keeping his commandments.

Then we will also receive God’s blessings. We are to keep God’s commandments, our text says, ***“so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time.”*** The blessing of the Lord was upon Israel and God promised them and their children after them a long life in the Promised Land.

Jesus says to us, ***“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”*** John 15:9-11. That joy will be complete when we reach the promised land of heaven. Today, then, let us not only with our lips say, ***“O give thanks to the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endures forever.”*** Psalm 106:1. (NKJV) Let us also show our thankfulness by gladly and willingly obeying God’s commandments. Let us pray,

“Take my life and let it be

Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;

Take my moments and my days,

Let them flow in ceaseless praise.” Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal 400:1)

(Sermon from Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 2005)