

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Thanksgiving, November 25, 2021

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

Hymns: 574, 568, 36, 567, 570: 1 and 8.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 8: 10-18. 1 Timothy 2: 1-8. Luke 17: 11-19.

Sermon Text: Philippians 4:8-20.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Do you have enough? Let me put it this way: Do you want more? More of what, you might ask? Why, more of everything, things, possessions, wealth, power or influence, friends, admirers, praise. I think that every one of us would admit that there is something of this world we want.

And I think every one of us here would admit that the Devil, Satan, wants to offer more to us. He wants us to want more so that he can pull us in with the bait of this world, like a poor, stupid fish that bites on the bait or lure on your fishing line and ends up losing his life.

So how should we react to all the tempting things of this world? We all know that everything we have is a gift from God and for that we are thankful. After all, isn't that what the celebration of Thanksgiving Day is really all about? Being thankful to God? And yes, God has provided all things in this world. But more importantly, he has really provided all of us with all we really need – for this world and the next! And for that,

WE REJOICE GREATLY IN THE LORD

There is one thing we should want more of, but I will come back to that later. Right now, let's talk about

- 1. Contentment which is a gift of God.** And we are here tonight so that
- 2. We can Thank God for all He has done.** And we want to be reminded, too that
- 3. We should Thank one another for all they have done.**

There is a great difference between “needs” and “wants”. We know that but keep forgetting. Not everything we want is something we need. Many businesses know that and use that to tempt us to buy something newer or better. And the devil is always tempting us with things that our sinful flesh thinks we want. But we have a weapon which God can provide to help us fight the urges to get what we “want” rather than what we really “need”.

That weapon is a simple word – contentment. God tells us ***“But godliness with contentment is great gain.”*** 1 Timothy 6:6 (NIV)

In Hebrews we read ***“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper.’”*** (Hebrews 13:5-6 NIV) That means to be satisfied and happy with what you have and not to want more. That means to realize that having more will not necessarily bring us greater happiness.

Has God ever lied to you? Has he ever not told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in his Word, the Bible? Has he ever not fulfilled everything he promises?

Man sinned soon after he was created as the jewel or crown of God's creation. So God promised and delivered on his promise to redeem mankind from sin. He didn't do it just when man wanted it, but he did it in his own good time. St. Paul tells us that ***“when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons”*** Gal 4:4-5 (NIV). So God kept his promise. So you have that assurance that he will keep his promises to you even if you think he's not doing it.

Is there any greater gain than being content with all that God has provided? We have gained not just things for this world, but we have gained eternal life when we are content and satisfied with God's salvation through faith in his only son, Jesus Christ. Scripture reminds us ***"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."*** 1 Timothy 6:7 (KJV)

You can't take anything of this world with you when you die. Ancient pagan peoples like the Egyptians provided great wealth in the tombs of their rulers, thinking that they could use them in "the afterlife". But you know what? Every time someone finds the untouched tomb of a wealthy Egyptian now, thousands of years later, the wealth that was buried with them is still there! God goes on to tell us what we really need: ***"And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."*** 1 Timothy 6:8 (KJV) And that Word "raiment" literally means "a covering". In Minnesota, that "covering", or "raiment" in a broad sense also includes a roof over our heads. And, of course, our sinful flesh always wants something more, or bigger, or better, or fancier, when it comes to the food we eat, the clothes we wear and the roof over our heads!

Scripture warns us: ***"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."*** 1 Timothy 6:9-10 (NIV) Among the things that lead people away from the truth of God's word is wealth, and the desire to be wealthy. Covetousness. Greed. Haven't you, too, heard stories of people who have gained great wealth and with it has come much grief? And then there is an admonition and encouragement for you, O man of God, O woman of God: ***"But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."*** 1 Timothy 6:11 (NIV)

Jesus himself gives us this picture: ***"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 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. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*** (Mat 6:24-34 NIV) Did you notice carefully what he means by "all these things" that will be given to you as well? He was talking about what to eat and what to drink, and what to wear. He wasn't promising us \$200,000 automobiles and \$5,000,000 houses. He wasn't promising us expensive jewelry and so many possessions that we have to rent storage places to keep them. He was promising food and raiment!

So let us be content with what God has given us!

And think about what God has given us! We don't have to look forward to only a bowl of rice tomorrow. We don't have to dread an empty cupboard on Friday. We don't have to fear for our lives at this very moment in this church because of armed militia who don't share our religious convictions. We don't have to worry about an awful lot of things. God has provided us with more blessings than we could have imagined! God has given us more than our ancestors – even just a few generations ago – would have dreamed about! Read your history books. Read your "Little House On The Prairie" books – including the cookbook! to see what little our forefathers had and what little variety they had in their diets and what they had to fear from disease and starvation.

I hope that in your table prayers for your Thanksgiving Day meal you will take time to list some of the blessings that God has given you. Even your children could name things to be thankful for. Why not make your table prayers a time to "Thank God" and "ask God". But your sinful flesh will remind you that prayers should be short so that the gravy won't get cold! From the huge piles of grain – not just in storage buildings but even stored on the ground – to the cupboards and freezers and closets full in our homes, God has surely blessed us.

And don't forget the spiritual blessings. Right now, you can think of the assurance of eternal life you have because of what God did for you. Yes, we are all sinners, and don't deserve anything. But God, in his love, sent Jesus Christ to live a perfect life of perfect obedience and then to be punished for sin – for our sins. Then God's grace gives us what we need for life after death! We have the assurance of heaven because of what he did, not because of anything we have to do. All we do is hold out our hands in faith and he gives.

But we also, like St. Paul in our text, should thank one another. Listen to his encouragement and a benediction: ***“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”*** By his teaching and preaching and striving to make his life consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he had been an example to them.

We, too should daily ***“rejoice greatly in the Lord”*** about all that the Lord has given us – earthly gifts and spiritual gifts. But Paul takes a few words to thank fellow Christians for gifts they had given him. We, like Paul, know that everything comes from God. But God uses fellow human beings – family, friends, and especially Christian friends – to provide for our needs – and often much more than our needs! The Philippian Christians had apparently sent Paul a gift – perhaps money – in Rome as he faced trial. He tells us that they had been concerned about him, ***“but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*** He's not asking for more. He emphasizes what we talked about earlier – contentedness. He was content and had learned to be content through many trials and pains. He had even written to the Corinthians ***“I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.”*** (2 Cor 11:27 NIV) But he had told the Romans that nothing, not ***“trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword”*** could separate us from the Love of Christ.

He shares his appreciation in writing! How often we forget to thank others for all they do for us. And even when I have opportunity weekly to stand before you I often forget to thank you for all you do for me, for my family, for your whole Christian family. Paul says ***“Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.”*** Apparently not every congregation was as thoughtful and generous as the Philippian congregation. He emphasizes that by writing this he isn't looking for more to be given him: ***“Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”*** In St. Paul we have an example for thanking especially our fellow Christians. And I think you all realize that when you are removed from fellow Christians at a difficult time you especially appreciate and miss them!

So today you have been reminded that Contentment is a gift of God. May you all be content with what God has so generously provided you! And may you every day thank God for all He has done. And may you always be grateful and thank one another for all they have done.

Oh – and there is one other thing. There is one area in your life where you really should not be content, but should always want more. What is that? Don't be content with the spiritual gifts you have been given. Seek more. Just listen carefully to the Lord's Prayer. There is one petition asking for earthly blessings but 6 petitions asking for spiritual blessings. Keep demanding those spiritual blessings from God! Christ himself said ***“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*** (Luke 11:9-10 NIV)

And we close with Paul's own blessing in this text: ***“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”***