

21 November 2007
Eve of National Thanksgiving

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Remember, to Give Thanks”

Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-10; Philippians 4:6-20

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Remember to give thanks.” That is the mantra of thanksgiving. And truthfully, we need it. We need to be reminded each year, each day. For we are a people who have forgotten how to give thanks. We demand and expect service instead of thanking others for it. Thank you notes are becoming a thing of the past. Feelings of entitlement produce not thanks but resentment, when we do not get what we think we had coming.

But we are not the first. The people of Israel forgot how to give thanks as well. Moses recognized the problem. And so he tells the people to remember, for remembering is the key to giving thanks. Don’t just “remember to give thanks” – but **remember**, to *give* thanks. For it is the remembering that is important, and that will lead to lives of thanksgiving.

And so Moses tells them:

remember the Lord’s leading in the wilderness;
remember His testing;
remember His provision of bread and meat and water;
remember your clothes and shoes lasting far longer than they should have!
remember His discipline;
remember His Word and His promises.

Remember, Moses says, and you will *ble*ss the Lord. Moses doesn’t use the word “thanksgiving” there, but **ble**ss – a word which *includes* thanksgiving, but means much more. For it also includes faith, trust, worship, praise, honor, and glory. It is to acknowledge the gifts received and to make known the goodness of the Lord, who gives such gifts to men. For such is the highest form of thanksgiving – not just to thank the Giver, but to make known what He has done.

And notice, all the things the people would remember were not just pleasant memories!

They would remember the rebellion that caused the additional 40 years of wilderness wandering.

They would remember the episode with the fiery serpents.

They would remember the fears, the hunger, the humbling, the struggle.

All was not a bed of roses.

And isn't that what we find in our lives as well? When you look back and remember this past year, or through your life, you will remember such times as well.

Not just good times, and times of plenty and joy;

but also times when things were difficult,

when there was fear and doubt;

times of sadness and testing and humbling.

In your life too, all has not been a bed of roses.

But you are here because through it all, the Lord is faithful. Perhaps you too grumbled and complained, like the people of Israel.

For provision not good enough.

For help that did not come speedily enough.

For humbling and discipline that you would rather not have received!

Yes, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, does it? From Adam and Eve, to the people of Israel, to you and me today.

But with such remembering – of things both good and bad – we remember what is most important of all: *and it is not our remembering at all!* What is most important is **that the Lord remembers us.** He remembers His promises. He remembers to have mercy. He remembers to provide. We are never far from His mind. He never forgets us. And though He may seem to delay, or not act fast enough; though we may not always understand His ways, or get answers to all the “why” questions we *want* answered – His love never fails.

His love in providing our daily bread: food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like. (*Small Catechism, Explanation to the Fourth Petition*)

His love in defending us against all danger, and protecting us from all evil. (*Small Catechism, Explanation to the First Article*)

And most of all, **His love** in sending His Son

to ascend the cross in our place;

to lay down His life for us;

to atone for our sins. For *all* our sins, including our forgetfulness, our ingratitude, our rebellion, our grumbling and complaining. He knows the desperate condition of both our bodies and our souls, and promised and did something about it. And not just once did He send His Son, but now over and over again, as we receive the body and blood of Jesus here. A sacrifice once made, a gift constantly given. *Do this in remembrance of Me*, He said. And as we do this, yes we remember Him, for He remembers us.

And then we too then **bless the Lord**. We acknowledge the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation here received, and we make known the goodness of the Lord, who gives such gifts to men. For such is the highest form of thanksgiving – not just to thank the Giver, but to make known what He has done.

And this then leads to one other blessing, whose importance should not be underestimated – the blessing and gift of contentment and peace. It is as we heard from St. Paul: *“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”*

Indeed, *all things*, for the Lord remembers us. And in and under His watchful eye, His powerful hand, His loving heart, and His merciful mind, *He will supply every need*. No cry of His children unheard, no pain unknown, no trouble too great, no enemy too strong. His forgiveness and love enduring forever, until the day He brings us into the Promised Land of Heaven.

So remember. Remember the way the Lord your God has led you and provided for you and saved you, these nine, or twenty, or forty, or eighty years. Remember Him who remembers you always. Remember, and give thanks.

In the name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.