Psalm 118:1

Thanksgiving 2017

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he’s good, his love endures forever.*

Why are we here today? I am not looking for an explanation that details the historic gathering of the Pilgrims and Native Americans in the early 1600s. I am not talking about the time-honored traditions of Thanksgiving dinner, the turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie. As Americas we celebrate Thanksgiving about this time every year. But why?

The history of Thanksgiving Day in the USA is as old as the country itself. Our first President, George Washington, suggested that it would be a good idea to observe a day of national thanksgiving.

A number of states acted on his wishes, but it was not until 1863 that Thanksgiving became a national holiday. In the middle of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln set aside the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day. In 1941, Congress established the formula we still use today. And so for over 76 years now, Americans have been sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner on the 4th Thursday in November.

That little history lesson tells us why we are here today, but it does not explain why we are here today. After all, Thanksgiving is not a religious festival. Thanksgiving is not a part of the church year either. Thanksgiving is a secular holiday celebrated by Jews and Christians and atheists alike. If Thanksgiving is not a religious holiday, then why do we come together to give thanks in God's house?

Freedom of speech in our country guarantees that anyone can say that he/she is thankful, but when Christians observe our national day of Thanksgiving we do so with the Giver in mind. Our words are not hollow words, misguided words spoken by someone but directed toward no one. Others may choose to give thanks today, but we *GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD.* We are thankful that his goodness is evident every day and that his love endures forever.

Earlier this week I read a list of what some children were thankful for. Some said that they were thankful for special people in their lives like mom and dad and grandma and grandpa. Others were thankful for things like sports and Xbox and video games. And more than one child mentioned God in their list of things for which they give thanks.

If we were to judge these students based upon their responses, I think that we would have to give them a passing grade. Many of these things are the same things we are thankful for. But when we give thanks to God, when we say our personal prayers before we go to bed at night, do we sometimes have a way of gravitating toward the big things, the big blessings, that easily come to mind?

Don’t get me wrong. It is good and right and God-pleasing to thank God for these big blessings. But if we give it a little more thought, it does not take long to see the evidence of God's goodness everywhere, even in the smallest details of our lives. Let me give you a couple examples.

When you woke up this morning, how many of you thanked the Lord for gravity? How many of you have ever thanked God for gravity? We cannot see it, but we rely on it. If you drop your hymnal, you know exactly what will happen. When you build a house, gravity helps hold everything together. When you walk out of your house, gravity
keeps you from floating into the sky. Now try to imagine all of the problems we would encounter if there was no gravity tomorrow.

When you woke up this morning, how many of you thanked the Lord for your thumbs? As far as the parts of the body go, the thumb is not essential for life. It does not pump blood. It does not help us breathe. But if you want to be frustrated for the rest of the day, try to do all the things you normally do without them and then ask yourself how important they are.

We may not consider these things to be major blessings, but they would be extremely difficult to live without. And if I was able to come up with a couple examples in just a couple minutes, imagine how many other things there are that we take for granted every day.

The point of all this is not to make you feel guilty for not appreciating God's blessings. What I want you to come away with, especially on Thanksgiving Day, is an understanding that God's goodness can be found everywhere, even in the tiniest details. For all of these blessings we give him thanks.

If we tried to make a complete list of all our blessings, it would be impossible. Our days on this earth will run out long before our reasons to be thankful. What we do know is that every blessing we receive flows from a common source, a source without beginning and without end. Above all, today we give thanks to the Lord - because his love endures forever.

Let's take a closer look at some of those big blessings I mentioned before, the kinds of things that people might think of first when they count their blessings, things like our possessions, our health, friends and family, peace and safety.

There is no doubt that we have been blessed with prosperity. I do not have share the statistics with you, but I doubt that anyone would dispute the fact that we live in the richest nation in the history of the world. We have garages filled with stuff, closets full of clothes, shelves full of food.

But how many of us are still driving our first car? How many of us are still wearing the clothes we bought 25 years ago, even 5 years ago? We thank God for the materials things we have, and rightly so, but we do so with the understanding that they do not last forever.

Health is a tremendous blessing. But the older a person gets, the more gray hairs that appear, the more trips to the doctor, as new pills are added to the daily diet, all of these things remind us that our bodies will not last forever.

Family and friends are a great blessing. But even the people we hold near and dear to us, our own flesh and blood, the people we count on the most sometimes disappoint us. And for those of us who are blessed with an abundance of people we love and who love us in return, the obituary page coldly reminds us that our relationships cannot last forever.

Peace and safety are blessings from God. We are protected by the most powerful military in the world, but our freedom is not free. Thousands of soldiers will not be sitting down with their families this Thanksgiving because they are serving in places far away from home. Renewed hostilities in the Middle East remind us that in our world peace does not last forever.

Most of these blessings, most of the things we rightfully thank God for, are only
temporary, but there is one exception. In our ever-changing world, we give thanks for one blessing that will never change. We give thanks to the Lord because his love endures forever.

God's love was evident at creation. Not only did the Lord give Adam and Eve a perfect place to live. When they disobeyed him and ruined his creation, God did o't condemn them forever. Before the Lord cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, he gave them a promise. He promised to send the seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head.

For thousands of years, God's love never wavered. And that love was never more evident than at the cross. God made good on his promise by sending his Son into the world. And when his enemies mocked and jeered and slapped him in the face, Jesus did not fight back. Jesus did not use his divine power to destroy them. Instead he asked God to forgive them. And then he gave up his life to pay for their sins.

We can still see the evidence of that amazing love whenever we go to God in confession. Every time we sin, we slap God in the face. Every time we fail to stand up for the truth, God hears our silent taunts and jeers. And every time we get down on our knees, every time we confess our sins to God, his love endures.

We do not have to wonder if God has finally had enough. We do not have to wonder if our personal list of sins has gotten too long. When we lay our sins at Jesus' feet, when we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and he will forgive us - no matter what we have done - no matter how many times we have been there before.

For the repentant sinner, God's love endures forever. It was there before the creation of the world. It will remain long after this world has been destroyed. And on the Last Day God's love will play a very important role in our coronation.

This coming Sunday is the last Sunday of the church year, also known as Christ the King Sunday. We will celebrate the fact that Jesus is ruling over all things. We will sing hymns with royal titles like All Hail The Power Of Jesus' Name and Crown Him With Many Crowns.

But when I use the term coronation today, I am not talking about Jesus. Christ will always be our King, but God's love makes another coronation possible. God promises that those who believe in Jesus will reign with Jesus in heaven. God promises that the faithful will be given a crown of righteousness. Or to borrow from the language of Psalm 118, God's enduring love guarantees that we will live with him forever.

The opening words of that psalm are familiar to most of us, and my guess is that many of us will pray them when we sit down to eat tomorrow/later today. As well as they serve well as a prayer of thanksgiving for our food, their application’s much broader. The psalmist does not get into specifics, but in a general and yet beautiful way he reminds us whom we thank and why we have so many reasons to thank him. Give thanks to the LORD, for he’s good, his love endures forever. Amen.

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