

November 24th message

I have a quote to read to you today, I have left out the name and office of this person but most of you will recognize it. “Therefore, I do hereby appoint and set apart the last Thursday in November next as a day which I desire to be observed by all my fellow-citizens, wherever they may then be, as a day of thanksgiving and praise to Almighty God, the beneficent Creator and Ruler of the Universe. And I do further recommend to my fellow-citizens aforesaid that on that occasion they do reverently humble themselves in the dust and from thence offer up penitent and fervent prayers and supplications to the Great Disposer of Events for a return of the inestimable blessings of peace, union, and harmony throughout the land which it has pleased Him to assign as a dwelling place for ourselves and for our posterity throughout all generations.”

Yes, that was Abraham Lincoln’s Thanksgiving proclamation of 1863. And yes, of course many of you realized that the moment I started. That was the second paragraph after the first told about the difficulties occurring at the time. This nation was in the third year of a terrible civil war. The losses in lives and property were catastrophic. Yet Lincoln made this proclamation to remind our nation of our many blessings.

Fast forward to today and perhaps we as a nation need that reminder again. We are such a blessed people yet we often dwell on the negative. And while there is much room for improvement and hope for the future, we need a lesson on how the Lord has continued to provide.

While Thanksgiving is still an important holiday it seems to be losing its significance. The reason for the holiday often gets overlooked between the marketing of Halloween and Christmas. To many it is just turkey day. Yes, it’s a busy time for travel and seeing family and feasting and football, yet we can easily overlook the many things we should be giving thanks for. So this morning I wanted us to look at some scripture that addresses this topic.

We usually hear our gospel reading from John with messages about seeking things that will last. 5000 have just been fed. Jesus had become a meal ticket. Jesus had to teach them there was more to life.

We are probably all familiar with the story of the first Thanksgiving. But this morning I'd like to share a few tidbits of information you may not know. Only about half of the original Mayflower occupants survived that first year. Even worse, only five wives of the original eighteen that landed at Plymouth participated in that first Thanksgiving meal. Yet they were thankful to be in this new land. This was a time of gratitude and praise.

This week I came across an interesting article, it didn't claim to be scientific, but it brought to light an observation by its author. It told of how at the turn of the 20th century, there were 84 things/items which the average, middle-class American desired to possess or have. Of those, however, only seventeen were deemed necessities, and the rest were regarded as luxuries. Then by the 1980's the number had grown to four-hundred-twenty-four things/items which the same average, middle-class American desired have and the list of 'necessities' had grown to one hundred twenty-seven. The author told how we should be nearly six times more thankful than our great-grandparents and how we should also be about twenty-seven times more grateful than the pilgrims.

This article concluded there, but if we think about the past 40 plus years we can see how our own lists that we consider necessities has grown, including the want/need for cellular phones and internet.

Recently our refrigerator went on the blink and we purchased a new one. The new one lasted 10 days before the control panel quit. Getting someone to fix it under warranty has been quite a task. This experience has taught me to be thankful for even something as common as a working refrigerator in our kitchen.

This gospel reading reminds us to seek bread that feeds more than the body. Thanksgiving is then more than just a holiday in November. It's a way of life of gratitude for what our Savior has done for us.

In our Philippians reading Paul instructs us how to go to God in prayer and petition with a thankful heart. Ultimate thankfulness does not just happen, it's part of Christ dwelling within us. Paul is writing this letter from prison yet he tells how one should be anxious for nothing.

After a few phone calls I learned my refrigerator service technician will be coming sometime tomorrow. I also learned that what probably broke is hard to get and is on back order, yet I hope for the best. I look at this and realize how this is a bump in the road compared to what many are facing. I look at my friend and colleague and see how he has coped so well with an accident he was the victim of and how he is grateful it wasn't worse. I hear of a family friend recently diagnosed with cancer and admire her outlook and faith. Again this just doesn't happen, Paul knows that no matter what happens Christ is with him and he writes this letter in this joy and thankfulness. Then one can know the kind of peace described here. It is not a temporary kind that comes and goes as events change; rather it is ultimate joy that comes from knowing Jesus as your savior.

This of course doesn't mean everything will go well sometimes it's just the opposite. Out of this one often learns humility. A woman named Shirley Rinehart tells how hardships and heavy burdens taught her to be responsible and strong. She tells how irritating situations taught her the meaning of patience. She said that physical and mental pain had taught her to be compassionate with others. She went on to say: "God has blessed me with failures that I might become humble. I've been placed in difficult situations that have forced me to think and grow in wisdom. I have experienced varied conflicts, and I have learned the value of peace."

I'm sure we can all relate to what she has said. We, too, can and hopefully have found life becomes better when our hearts are grateful, when we thank God for the blessings and opportunities and challenges each day brings. I would also add that the need for humility is one of the biggest needs we face today. But I think it's always been that way. That's why I included our Deuteronomy reading today. In the eighth Chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses continues to instruct the

people of Israel and us. In part he tells, "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you ... that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart. Man does not live by bread alone." Sounds familiar doesn't it?

So as we look at our lives this week of Thanksgiving let us rediscover the joy we have in knowing Our Lord and Savior. And let us live accordingly. On that note I have an ABC list of things to be thankful for limiting each to two letters:

For "A" appreciation and autumn, Under "B" we have the Bible and the many blessings we all know. "C" is for Christ and children. "D" offers discipline and duty. "E" gives us Easter and enthusiasm. "F" faith and forgiveness, "G" it is God and generosity. Under "H" there is healing and hope. "I" suggests imagination and inspiration, "J" offers Jesus and joy, "K" gives us kindness and the Kingdom. "L" could stand for laughter, life and love. For "M" we are thankful for marriage and ministry. "N" I suggest nature and neighbors. "O" suggests opportunities and optimism, "P" parents and peace. "Q" brings to mind quality and quietness. "R" could stand for rain and righteousness. For "S" we have salvation and serenity. Under "T" there are trees and time. "U" suggests unity and usefulness. "V" offers variety and the Voice of God. "W" is for wisdom and warmth. "X" we are thankful for X-rays in therapy and xylophones.' "Y" could stand for yeast and "Z" has Zion as a name for our heavenly home.

Our last hymn has quite a history to it. According to my book, Then Sings My Soul, a seventeenth-century German pastor named Martin Rinkhart is said to have buried 5,000 parishioners in one year. That's an average of about fourteen a day. The city of Eilenberg, Saxony in Germany was being ravaged by war, disease, and oppression because of the 30 years' war that was ravaging Europe. Many of the other pastors in the area had died as a result of the terrible times they were living. Rinkhart found he was the only one left. Yet, because of his faith and courage, he was involved in a truce that put an end to the hostilities there.

He wrote what started out as table grace that was later put to music. He knew there could be no healing without thanksgiving.

This hymn has become a favorite of many. It reminds us of how we should be eternally thankful to our God. As we gather with family and friends this week let us remember these words and do our best by God's grace to live lives worthy of our calling. Amen.