

Sermon for November 23, 2017 - Thanksgiving

Deuteronomy 26:10a

Theme: **We thank you, O Lord . . .**

- 1) . . . for all you have given us.
- 2) . . . with the firstfruits of your blessings.

“And now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.”

“And now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.” This statement was part of a formula that every Israelite spoke during each of the three harvest festivals, when they brought their thank offerings to God.

You see, the LORD wanted the Israelites to bring their firstfruits (that is, the very first and best produce of each harvest) to the temple as an offering. As each Israelite presented his gift to the LORD, he was to recall the love the LORD showed him: how, even before he was born, God showed him mercy by guiding his forefather Jacob and his family into Egypt; how Israel grew into a great nation, and how the LORD finally brought the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan - a land flowing with milk and honey. This whole process was to remind the Israelite of God’s complete and utter mercy: that everything he has and is, is a gift from God. Seeing God’s love and faithfulness in the past, he would trust that God would continue to provide for him in the future. He trusted in God’s promise to save the world from sin through the coming Messiah.

After reminding himself of these things, the Israelite would present his gifts, and say, “And now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.”

We are gathered here today to remember God’s goodness to us and to thank him for it. Now, we certainly often thank God for the food on our table, making us believers, and saving us or a loved one from disaster, but when was the last time we sat down and really considered God’s providence: all that he has done for us? When was the last time we thanked him for our senses, the ability to think, the ability to will, and the ability to feel? When was the last time we looked at our past, our parents’ past, and thanked God for guiding history so that we could be where we are now, and members of God’s family?

Today is an excellent time to ponder, as did ancient Israel, on how many ways God is involved in our lives. I wrote this sermon as a prayer: a prayer considering many of the numerous blessings God has given us. As I pray, please ponder all these gifts in your own mind and heart. Please think about all the things God has done for each of you, individually. If you choose to, feel free to pray along in your heart with me. Come, let us thank the LORD for all he has given us. Let us thank him with the firstfruits of his gifts.

- 1) . . . for all that you have given us.

Dear LORD, how wonderful is the love you have shown us. Eternity is not enough time to praise and thank you. So numerous are all the blessings you have shown us, that I hardly know where to begin.

First of all, we thank you for creating this wonderful world, the stars, the sun, the moon, the forests and seas. When we go for an evening walk, you marvel us with your breath-taking sunsets. The heavens look like a painter’s canvas, with colors wonderfully splashed all over it.

We thank you for the marvelous way you created the earth and preserve both people and animals. You cause the seasons to come and go, the sun to shine, rain to fall, and plants to grow. You provide food for all things. Without your care, nothing would exist.

We thank you for creating us, and marvel at all the abilities that you have given humans. Even the greatest minds on earth can't come close to figuring out the mind you created in each of us. You created us to see, touch, taste, smell, and hear all the wonders of creation; and thus to enjoy them. You created us to will, think, and feel, and even to create things on our own, such as music, art, and technology; all to be used to your glory.

Unfortunately, man fell into sin. He used the very gift of will you gave him to rebel against you. Because of this, all people are born sinful, including us. We rebelled against you, and wanted to know neither you nor your goodness. We were a stench in your sight: spiritually dead men, doomed to hell, who didn't even want to be saved.

But you showed your love for us by sending Jesus into the world. He gave up everything, and became nothing for us. You allowed him to take on our sinfulness and suffer our punishment for us on the cross. You did this for the whole world, even though the whole world hated you.

You gave the world your Gospel, and the Holy Spirit to create faith in the hearts of people. You called and empowered men and women to be your servants, your witnesses. You kept the Church safe from extermination during persecution, and delivered it from people who tried to twist your truth into lies in order to lead others away from you.

You guided history so that we could hear the Gospel. You called us through your Word, and made us your children through Baptism and faith in the Word. You gave us great zeal to do your will.

As we look back at our life, we can't help but see your hand in all of it. Every person you had us meet was for a purpose. When we look back at our youthful rebellion, and all the evil we did, we marvel at how you forgave all of it, and turned it all around for our good! How did you do this, dear LORD?

We also praise you for all the seemingly insurmountable problems you put in our way. At the time we had no idea how we would overcome them. That is when you came in and overcame them for us. We still stand awe-struck at how you delivered us when we struggled with broken friendships, addictions, sicknesses, deaths of loved ones, financial troubles, and our own pet sins. You were always there to call us to repentance, forgive us and carry us through.

Dear Lord, you have blessed us with more than we ever needed. Though there may have been times when we were in danger of not having enough, you were always there to provide. We always had food to eat, clothes to wear, and water to drink. The fact that we can stand here and praise you for this proves your providence in our life: that you never abandoned us. Lord, you actually have given us more than we need. You have blessed us with more wealth than most of the world's population has ever known.

You have given us talents and abilities so that we can work. You have given us work, a means through which you provide for us. You have given us so many comforts: homes, TV's, smartphones, and many other luxuries. You have given us a wonderful Church family: one that cares for each other, loves each other, and prays for each other.

You promise to keep on guiding us through this life that we might receive the crown of eternal life kept safe for us in heaven. We trust that you will resurrect our bodies – allowing us to live with you in the beautiful paradise you promise that you will create for us on the last day. Thank you, dear God, O Thank you!

2). . .with the firstfruits of your blessings

O Lord, without your guidance, providence and love, we wouldn't even exist. None of the blessings we enjoy would be ours. All that we have in life (our homes, TVs, cars, careers and clothing, all that we are, all our talents, our salvation, **our whole being** is a gift from you. All these things demonstrate your love to us - your wonderful undeserved love. Your love makes us want to love you back. O how we desire to thank you for all that you have done to and for us. We wish we could help the poor more, and give more support to the Church . . . we wish we could show you and others the very same love you showed us, but . . .

But we are afraid. We are afraid that we might have to suffer. We are afraid of what people might think when we tell them about you. We are afraid that we might not have enough or lose the wonderful physical blessings we now enjoy from you if we freely give them to others. We are ashamed of ourselves. We are ashamed because we know that we are not trusting you like we should. We are ashamed because we are starting to love your gifts more than you.

Lord, these are the exact reasons why you want us to give you the firstfruits of our life: the first and best things you have given us. You want us to remember your love for us, as we recall the innumerable blessings you have given us. You want us to remember that all we have is from you, so that we may love you; so that our faith may grow.

You also tell us that we should not worry about this life, but always think about the eternal life Christ won for us, kept safe for us in heaven. You promised us that you will provide for us, just as you provide for the lilies and sparrows. As we look at our past, we see that you have never failed us. If you had, we wouldn't be here praying!

You also promise that you will graciously reward those who remember and thank you with their firstfruits. You, the almighty God, praised the widow for giving her last mite to you. You gave unlimited oil and flour to the widow who gave help to your prophet. You challenged Israel, and all who read and your word, to test you: to see whether or not you won't open up the treasure house of heaven and shower down blessings on those who give their firstfruits to you in faith.

You love a cheerful giver! We are but sowers, and your blessings are the seed we sow on this earth, so that the earth may produce an abundant harvest of believers. If we hoard our seed, and only sow it sparingly, we will have seed, but only that which we save. If we spread out our blessings and sow them for you, you promise to give us more and more seed: more and more blessings!

Oh dear Lord, you do what you promise. How many wonderful blessings have we forfeited because of our lack of faith? You have never lied to us. There is not a promise you made that you haven't kept. You always help us in the past. O we, of little faith! Why do we hurt ourselves, and keep ourselves from all the wonderful blessings that you have promised us?

Forgive our lack of faith, and reassure us that you indeed have forgiven us. Remind us again of your love for us; a love that moved you to send Jesus to die for our sins. Reassure us through the Gospel that our sins are indeed forgiven. We trust in your forgiveness, your love, and your Son! And now . . .

And now, brothers and sisters in Christ, let us praise the LORD! Come let us present our firstfruits to God! Let us remember all that God has done for us, how he has physically blessed us. Let us use our gifts to thank God, and show our trust that he will keep on providing. He promises it. Don't doubt it.

Let us also thank God by giving ourselves to Him as He gave himself for us. Let us now deny our evil natures, and joyfully dedicate ourselves to him and his work. This means taking every opportunity we can to read hear, and study his Word, come to the Lord's Supper, and spread the Gospel. It means to stop excusing our pet sins, yet also to repent and trust in the Lord's forgiveness when we do sin. It means to put God first in our lives and do everything to his glory.

May the LORD give all of us a strong faith and fiery zeal for Him. May we all be enflamed with the Holy Spirit. Lord, we see how you loved us, and all that you have done for us. **And now we bring and dedicate to you our firstfruits, our money, our talents, and our entire life, that you, O LORD, have given us."** Amen.