

Sermon For November 27, 2014 - Thanksgiving

Psalm 111 (NIV84)

Theme: The ABCs of praise.

- 1) Praise the Lord for His works
- 2) Praise the Lord for His Word.

¹ *Praise the LORD.*

I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

² *Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them.*

³ *Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever.*

⁴ *He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate.*

⁵ *He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.*

⁶ *He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations.*

⁷ *The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.*

⁸ *They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness.*

⁹ *He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever*

-- holy and awesome is his name.

¹⁰ *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.*

The compass has to be one of the most important inventions ever made. This simple device allowed ancient mariners to keep their sense of direction during foggy days and overcast nights.

God has offered us a compass for our earthly life - something that keeps us headed in the right direction even during life's darkest days. What is it? The fear of the LORD.

“What is the fear of the Lord?” you might ask. It is the proper understanding of who the LORD is, what we are in relation to him, and his interactions with us. To fear God is to revere him for who He is and what He does. And in order to gain proper reverence for God, we need to think about him and his works.

And this, brothers and sisters in Christ, is really what thanksgiving is all about: thinking about the LORD and his gracious interactions with us that we might grow in our fear, love and trust in him.

Let us then, with Psalm 111 as our guide, take time to think about all the wonderful things the Lord has done for us under the theme: **The ABC's of Praise.** 1) *Praise the Lord for His works.* 2) *Praise the Lord for His Word.*

Part One: Praise the Lord for his works.

Now, you might be wondering why I entitled this Sermon the ABC's of praise. The reason I did this is because, if you were to read this Psalm in Hebrew, you would see that every half-verse starts with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This Psalm literally is an “ABCs” of praise.

But before running through the Hebrew Alphabet, the author provided a one-word theme for this Psalm:

Hallelujah: *Praise the Lord!*

The Psalmist does not call us to worship Buddha, Allah, or some generic "God" in the universe. He does not want us to put our trust in governments, celebrities or technology. He calls us to focus our attention on the LORD – whose works and words proclaim him as the one and only God.

And how does the author of this Psalm wish to worship the Lord? I will tell you what he doesn't do: he doesn't treat worship as some "traditional" thing to do on the holidays – as if the mere motions he goes through will earn brownie points with God. No, the Psalmist says:

I will extol the LORD with all my heart

Here we catch a glimpse at one of God's great works: the ability to love the Lord. You see, the Bible says that *the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.* (Rom 8:7 NIV84). All people have inherited such a nature from Adam and Eve. According to our sinful natures, all people are helplessly lost from God and unable to even begin to love him.

But look at what the LORD has done: not only has his Son paid for our sins, but his Spirit, working through his Word, has enabled us to recognize our sin, repent, and turn to him in faith and love. It's because of God's great work for us that we can look to God in love - worshipping him with our whole heart. And where will we do this?

in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

The term "council of the upright," in Hebrew, suggests a close knit fraternity - like being with your closest friends, from whom you don't hide any secrets. They are "upright" because, through faith, their sins have been forgiven and they have been clothed with Christ's righteousness. God has instituted the Church to be a close knit family of believers to whom we can go to when we have a problem, and with whom we can praise the LORD.

Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them.

Consider the vast beauty of the universe that proclaims God's almighty power on every starry night, or the fact that our planet teems with life. Ponder on all the forces and beauty in nature and you will see that everything points to the Lord's wisdom and might. And yet do people acknowledge it? Sadly most people in the world do not.

But the believer does. The Holy Spirit, working through Scripture, leads the Christian to acknowledge God's wonderful works – that all we have and are comes from his gracious hand. What joy there is in knowing that the God who created all of this is my God, who loves me so much that he rescued me from my slavery to sin, as the next verses indicate.

³ *Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever.*

⁴ *He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate.*

⁵ *He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.*

⁶ *He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations.*

The Old Testament believers who heard these verses would immediately think about how the Lord gloriously delivered their ancestors from slavery in Egypt to the promised land of Canaan – fulfilling the promises He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob some 400 years before the exodus. The plagues, crossing of the Red Sea, manna and quail, water from the Rock and conquest of Canaan all proclaim the Lord's faithfulness, righteousness and love. He even instituted the Passover, gave Israel a place and

system of worship, and had Moses record everything the LORD did so that his deliverance might be remembered from generation to generation.

These mighty works the Lord performed in the past were merely a foreshadowing of the great and majestic deeds the Lord would perform for us in Christ. God remembered his covenant – his promise he made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, that a great descendant of theirs would crush the devil's power. The LORD demonstrated his immense love and compassion for fallen mankind by sending Jesus – his one and only Son - to deliver us from our slavery to sin by his perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection.

God's righteousness endures forever, and he offers this righteousness to all as a free gift – to be received through faith. And where does he offer us his righteousness and salvation? In the place where *he has caused his wonders to be remembered*: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Through these wonderful means of grace the LORD intimately unites us with his Son sacrifice for our sins. The Gospel declares all who believe it holy and righteous.

And it also reassures us of God's continued providence, that *He provides food for those who fear him* (that he will take care of our every bodily need as we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness) and that he will safely deliver us home to the promised new heaven and earth; where God's chosen people from every tribe, people, language and nation will stand before their LORD in peace, united by their common faith in Christ.

Yes, we have every reason to praise the LORD for all His wonderful works – and doing so increases both our faith and reverence of him. And why? Because:

⁷ The works of his hands are faithful and just

Part Two: Praise the Lord for His Word.

Everything God does on this earth demonstrates his supreme justice and faithful love. The Lord does not lie. His deeds all show that He keeps every promise he makes. This, in turn, should lead us to trust His promises and have great regard for His Word, because:

*all his precepts are trustworthy.
They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness.*

Everything the LORD has recorded for us in His Word – both Law and Gospel – is true, right, and for our benefit.

However the devil, world and our own sinful flesh try to prevent us from acknowledging this about God's Word. They tempt us into thinking that God's laws are too restrictive, his grace too generous, and his teachings on the roles of men and women and church fellowship – well those are just plain out of touch with the reality of our world.

But here is the truth: no matter what we may feel or think about God's Word, God has a reason for all that he has commanded and written. Whether we realize it or not, everything God has written in His Word was written for our benefit – to protect us from hidden spiritual dangers, to keep us from looking to ourselves for salvation, and to draw us ever closer to him in faith.

God doesn't ask us to understand his Word or excuse what he says when the world mocks it as old fashioned. No, what He wants is our trust. And when we humbly submit ourselves to his Word, it doesn't take too long to start seeing its marvelous beauty: how it all points to and comes together in Christ himself, as the Psalmist says:

⁹ He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever-- holy and awesome is his name.

From beginning to end, God's Word is a record of his love. I know that when a person first reads the Old Testament and sees examples of God's anger over sin and severe punishments that it might not seem like it, but the more time you spend in the Word – even in the Old Testament – the more you will see it's true.

The Bible starts with God creating a paradise for man who would fall into sin, and ends with God creating a new paradise for man whom God has saved. All the history in between those bookends is a history of how man separated himself from the LORD through sin, and how God responded by trying to win him back through His Son's suffering, death and resurrection. All of biblical history is summarized in the promise God spoke in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve into sin, when He said: *I will put enmity between you (devil) and the woman, and between your offspring (unbelievers) and hers (Jesus); he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*" (Genesis 3:15 NIV84)

The Bible is God's record of him keeping this everlasting covenant. All of Biblical history is really His story – the story of Christ; as Jesus himself said: *You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.* (John 5:39 NIV84) With this knowledge, understand then, that . . .

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.

Here, dear Christian, is your compass for life! Do you want direction in life so that you don't fall off the narrow path to heaven? Then fear the LORD. Read the Scriptures and understand that the God who shook mountain Sinai and threatens eternal damnation for all who sin against his law, is still God today. He has not changed. He is still hates and punishes sin

But this holy God also is a merciful God, one who – from before the creation of the world – planned out our salvation through His own suffering, death and resurrection. He is gentle and loving – wanting you to come to him in repentance and faith with all your worries, sins and burdens so that He might forgive all your sin and grant you relief. The LORD wants you to know exactly who he is so that you might revere him in faith. He wants you to be with him forever in heaven, and the way to get there is only through him.

When the Holy Spirit working through the Word leads us to repent of all sin and revere Jesus as we ought, then we will have a good understanding – not only of Scripture, but also about life in general. The fear, love and trust in him that his word awakens in our hearts, will guide us to make god-pleasing decisions. No, we won't be perfect this side of heaven, but we will have his compass to guide us through the dangerous rocks and shoals that threaten our faith in him.

Praise God for his works – all of which demonstrate his great love and salvation. Praise God for His Word – the means God uses to forgive our sins and make us his dearly loved children.

To him belongs eternal praise.

Amen.