

Date: October 12, 2025 (Thanksgiving Sunday)

1. Texts: Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Ps. 65; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Luke 17 :11-19.
2. Subject: thanksgiving.
3. Topic: saying thanks and showing thanksgiving.
4. Aim: guide.
5. Proposition: "Thanksgiving must be both heard and seen."

GIVE THANKS, BE THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving Sunday is a difficult day for preachers. Everyone in every pew is going to say, "Of course, I'm thankful to God for all that I have received." And which preacher is going to ask, "Are you really?" Everyone in every pew is going to say, "Of course, I know what thankfulness is." And which preacher would dare to ask, "Are you sure?" Thanksgiving is so traditional and so taken for granted, that it is a burden to preachers. Heck, it is highly likely that some people won't even come to Church to hear a sermon because of the preparations for this day. Thanksgiving Sunday is a difficult day for preachers.

But what preacher can just shut down the sermon? Not one. So, somehow, we have to make some spiritual sense out of our Thanksgiving.

First of all, if thanksgiving is to be genuine, then there has to be someone to whom we are thankful. That nearly goes without saying, but there is a bit of a catch: we cannot be thankful to ourselves. We have to be thankful to someone else. Again, that should go without saying. But most people actually think they have earned their Thanksgiving meal. Most people say, "I worked hard to provide for my family." Most cooks say, "I slaved over this hot stove. Those kids better be grateful." You can't be thankful for that which you have earned or for that for which you have worked.

So let's say that we will choose to be thankful to God. We won't claim our food or housing as part of our compensation package. We will be thankful to God for the material and spiritual blessings we enjoy.

The reading from Deuteronomy gives us clear instructions on how to do this.

When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God... He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.¹

We do work hard and save for retirement. The cooks and cleaners of our lives do work hard to provide. But it is God who so created us that we can work hard. God created us in his image so that we can be makers of our own fortune. God empowered people to set up systems through which we can work to achieve. We work. We create. But it is God who enables us to do so.

We can give thanks to God. Our Thanksgiving Sunday can be a genuine celebration of thanks to God.

But it is not enough to say, "Thank you," to God. We also have to behave thankfully.

We've all heard the saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Two things about this: the saying does NOT mean that we don't speak. It does mean that our actions speak powerfully alongside our words. Our thankful actions are worth a thousand thankful words.

Again, we call to mind that we are giving thanks to God. We say to him, "Thank you for all you have empowered in my life." We then have to act thankful to God. We have to show God that we are thankful to him.

¹ Deuteronomy 8:12-18.

As another saying goes, “This is easier said than done.”

I suspect that behaving thankfully is rather more contextual. We each will have to decide how we will support our thankful words with our own thankful actions. Like the words, the actions will have to express our thanksgiving to God. Each of us will have to decide how we will demonstrate our thankfulness to God.

There might be some common actions, like contributing to the finances of the Church and sharing in the responsibilities for worship. Volunteering in the community to assist those less materially blessed might be another common expression. Or inviting those without family feasts.

But our circumstances will have to inform our thankful actions. We can’t prescribe a list of definitive thanksgivings. Each of us will have to have a conversation with God as we verbally express our thanksgiving and then plan how to support that thanksgiving with our actions.

Briefly summarized, those who are thankful to God live thankfully for God. Saying “thank you” must always be supported with behaving thankfully. And the connection between our words and our actions must always be clear to ourselves and to others.

That’s what our sermon today is all about. Actually, that’s what our Christian lives are about, today and every day.

AMEN.