

Thanksgiving
November 25, 2020

“Joyfully praising God for His salvation” (Psalm 67:2)
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text for this Thanksgiving eve service is from our Psalm appointed for today, Psalm 67:1-4

**“God be merciful to us and bless us,
And cause His face to shine upon us,
2 That Your way may be known on earth,
Your salvation among all nations.**

**3 Let the peoples praise You, O God;
Let all the peoples praise You.
4 Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy!
For You shall judge the people righteously,
And govern the nations on earth.**

Here ends our text.

Has someone asked you today or recently, “What are you thankful for?” Well, if we took a moment to think about it, we could easily list quite a few things off the top of our heads. Good health, family, weather, friends, food etc. Most people, despite the rough year that has been 2020 with all the restrictions, safeguards, quarantining and uncertainty, can find something to be thankful for.

And that’s because God is good and merciful and blesses us even without our prayer. The 10 lepers cried out for mercy and Jesus gladly stopped and aided them. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 5 of who He is and who He wants us to be as His sons and daughters. God is love. He loves all people, even His enemies. As sons and daughters of God, we are to have the same mind as God toward our enemies.

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Yes, God shares His temporal blessings with all people, believers and unbelievers alike. And so, it should come as no surprise that unbelievers could also recognize some of these blessings and list things that they are thankful for.

What’s more, nature itself reveals God the Creator as Romans 1 tells us.

“what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful,”

The complete question is not just *what* you are thankful for, but *who* you are thankful to. And the correct answer is the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And once you know who you are thankful to, then you can begin to *know* all the blessings that our merciful God has for all the nations as Psalm 67 tells us.

“That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.”

For to know God’s “way” is to know the chief and greatest of all blessings that God gives to all mankind and wants all to treasure and be thankful for. What is this blessing? Well, God tells us clearly, “Your salvation”. He doesn’t want there to be any doubts.

His “way” is the one “way” to heaven, only made possible by the merciful shining of the second person of the Trinity’s “face” on all people. Jesus, that is, did cause His face of mercy and forgiveness to shine on all humanity when He humbled His glorious face to be spit upon, was crucified and died. His face shone with pure love, as He bore our sins, our unthankfulness, our failure to praise Him for all He has done for us. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life for all people!

And this, my friends in Christ, is the heart of all of our praise. For God has made His way known to you through His Word, sealed His way to you in your baptism and continues to be your Good Shepherd both now and eternally as we thanked God yesterday during Pick’s funeral.

It is through faith, by the power of the 3rd person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, that we know the “way” and can say that Jesus is Lord. It is this faith that moved one of the lepers to return to give thanks to Jesus for his healing and to hear from Jesus’ lips the assurance of the greatest healing, the healing of his soul. For Jesus says to the Samaritan, **“Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”** Literally, the word in the Greek, is “save”. Your faith has saved you.

While there is joy in all the material blessings that God gives, like physical healing and our good health, the gift of which Psalm 67 speaks of causes even greater joy.

“4 Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And govern the nations on earth.”

The correct understanding of this verse is so important. Yes, God is a just God and He judges with all justice as we heard on Sunday in the parable of the sheep and the goats. The goats were judged justly and received eternal condemnation for their sins. They had no one to defend them, for they had rejected Jesus.

Yet, God judges all people righteously through Jesus. His atoning sacrifice offers His righteousness to all nations. It is this gift of salvation that Psalm 67 speaks of which causes great joy. **“For God so loved the whole world that He gave His only begotten Son.”** God wants all people to be saved and sing for joy, the greatest joy! **“that whoever believes in Him shall be saved.” John 3:16.**

Judges righteously means that God judges a sinner, you and me not according to our unrighteousness, but according to Christ’s righteousness. That is why, again, Jesus calls the sheep on His right hand, the righteous. For they are cloaked with His righteousness. **“Enter into the joy of your Lord.” (Matthew 25:21)** The owner says these beautiful words to His servants who were faithful with five and two talents, as we heard two Sunday’s ago. It is the greatest joy to be forgiven, declared righteous, and live in complete righteousness for all eternity where there is no sadness because of sin!

So, also in our epistle reading, Paul rejoiced for the care that the Philippians had shown him.

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

He was glad for their act of love, but mainly rejoiced because they had done it in faith. For Paul, of course, knew how to live with plenty and with little. He learned

to be content in whatever state he was, full or in hunger. Giving thanks at all times, we **“can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”**. (Philippians 4:13)

So, Paul said, **“Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.”** (Philippians 4:17). What was most joyful to him was that they were living out their faith and showing forth its fruits. Paul reflected the mind of God that he wanted all people to be saved. He was filled with joy that the Philippians had believed and called them his joy and crown. (Philippians 1:25).

Even as he wrote them in chains, his heart was filled with joy that they were fellow believers in Christ.

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,” (Philippians 1:3-5)

Yes, God wants all people to be saved and is longsuffering by delaying His return. So, we’ve been hearing these past Sundays in 2 Peter 3:8-9 that one day is as a 1000 years because God wants all people to know the way of salvation!

So ends Psalm 67 with the our praising, our confessing of Jesus name, like Paul so that where the seed of God’s word is sown, more people believe in the Lord’s way of salvation, and the earth yields her increase of believers.

“Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us.” (Psalm 67:6)

Yes, God, our own God, the God we know by faith in Jesus Christ, whose face has shone upon us in love, who judges us righteously indeed blesses us. What a joy our God gives us! What thankfulness rises in our heart!! Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)