

Thanksgiving Lesson – November 24, 2021

GOSPEL: Psalm 126

"The Lord has done great things"

Context

“Psalm 126 expresses the themes of redemption and joy and gratitude to God. According to Matthew Henry, it was likely written upon the return of the Israelites from Babylonian captivity.

The Songs of Ascent are a special group of psalms comprising Psalms 120—134. The city of Jerusalem is situated on a high hill. Jews traveling to Jerusalem for one of the three main annual Jewish festivals traditionally sang these songs on the “ascent” or the uphill road to the city. According to some traditions, the Jewish priests also sang some of these Songs of Ascent as they walked up the steps to the temple in Jerusalem.

Each of the psalms in this collection begins with the title “A Song of Ascents.” While perhaps they were not originally composed for this purpose, these psalms were later grouped together for use in traveling toward Jerusalem for the yearly Jewish festivals.” (Excerpts from Wikipedia & gotquestions.org/Songs-of-Ascent.html)

Insight

“In this psalm, the theological theme of *restoration* is knitted together with the theme of *rejoicing*. The product is one of the grandest, most eloquent lyrical prayers in the Psalter.

It should be emphasized that the closing verses of the psalm are an appeal couched in the form of imaginative wishes: “May those who....” The Advent people who approach Christmas recall God’s restorative acts in the past. They recall the testimony of the nations to God’s deliverance. They recall their own joy. And they know that until the Son of God comes again,



we will be in constant and everlasting need of God’s continued restoration.

This psalm anticipates God’s acts that will reverse the fate of the people and by ending with a petition, it ends with that expectation hanging and waiting. The psalm is both memory and future hope. It stands in a place of waiting in the same ways that the other texts for this week stand in that same place. The psalm and the epistle wait for it, the Isaiah lesson promises it, and the Gospel lesson prepares for it.” (Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-psalm-126-9 & workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-of-advent-2/commentary-on-psalm-126-3)

Gospel Reading

“ It seemed like a dream, too good to be true,
when GOD returned Zion’s exiles.
We laughed, we sang,
we couldn’t believe our good fortune.
We were the talk of the nations—
“GOD was wonderful to them!”
GOD was wonderful to us;
we are one happy people.
And now, GOD, do it again—
bring rains to our drought-stricken lives
So those who planted their crops in despair
will shout “Yes!” at the harvest,
So those who went off with heavy hearts
will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.”

The Message

What Should Thanksgiving Mean?

“I hold and believe that I am God’s creature, that is, that God has given me and constantly sustains my body, soul, and life, my members great and small, all my senses, my reason and understanding, and the like; my food and drink, clothing, nourishment, spouse and children, servants, house and farm,

etc. Besides, God makes all creation help provide the benefits and necessities of life—sun, moon, and stars in the heavens; day and night; air, fire, water, the earth and all that it yields and brings forth; birds, fish, animals, grain, and all sorts of produce. Moreover, God gives all physical and temporal blessings—good government, peace, security. ~ **Martin Luther, The Large Catechism, "Explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed"**

It's easy to forget that a national day of Thanksgiving, though occasionally called for by American leaders since George Washington, was constituted as an annual affair and federal holiday during the Civil War. Amid that "lamentable civil strife," Abraham Lincoln called for an annual day – the last Thursday of November – to be set apart to give thanks to Almighty God for all the blessings of the previous year.

Perhaps it was the titanic struggle that created so much suffering that prodded Lincoln and his cabinet, particularly Secretary of State William Seward who wrote the actual proclamation, to remind the country that amid its difficulties they should not overlook the bountiful harvest that was a blessing to those living in both northern and southern states. Or perhaps it was a belief that only the God who blesses so abundantly could restore the peace that seemed so elusive and heal the many wounds across the nation. Or perhaps it was an intuition that only as we recognize how blessed we are do we find both the confidence and humility to move toward a peace born of equity.

Whatever the reason, the day was set aside for thanksgiving **to God**. And it's the preposition "**to**" that grabs my attention on this Thanksgiving weekend. We are thankful "**for**" many things, of course, but thanksgiving for things is always directed **toward** someone. Indeed, giving thanks makes little sense if that sense of gratitude is not directed outward, toward someone else.

Which brings me to this portion of Martin Luther's "Explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed" in his Large Catechism. In explaining what it means to say, "I believe in God

the Father, creator of heaven and earth," Luther dwells on God's role as benevolent creator. In doing so, he reminds us of all the things God has given us and, by extension, all the reasons we have to be thankful. Not simply thankful in general – is there such an emotion? – but thankful to God.

I hope this Thanksgiving weekend you have occasion to count your blessings, to reflect consciously on some of the good things given to you this past year, and to extend your thanks to those people who have been important to you. Saying "thank you," as I've written on before, is one of the secrets of true happiness. And amid these various expressions of gratitude, I hope you also take a moment to thank God for the many blessings – including the people – that surround us. Not because God needs our expressions of thanks, but because in recognizing that we are blessed – and giving thanks for those blessings – we are blessed yet again. Happy Thanksgiving."

(Excerpts from davidlose.net/2016/11/giving-thanks-to-god/)

Readings for Further Study

- [Jeremiah 33:11/Isaiah 35:10/Psalm 106:47-48/Psalm 71:19/Ezra 3:11](#) *The Lord has done great things*

Thought for the Day

"Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good." ~ *Maya Angelou*

A Thanksgiving Prayer

"So, we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthral ourselves. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. We cannot separate. There is no line, straight or crooked, upon which to divide. We cannot escape history. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The mystic chords of memory will yet swell the chorus of union. To every living heart and hearthstone, and again touch the better angels of our nature." **Amen.**

~ Abraham Lincoln, A Thanksgiving Prayer during the Civil War