

26 November 2008
Thanksgiving Eve

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“His Steadfast Love and Faithfulness”

Text: Psalm 138 (Deut 8:1-10; Phil 4:6-20; Luke 17:11-19)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

For what do you give thanks tonight?
For family, friends, and good neighbors.
For food, clothing, and shelter.
For good weather and peace.
For healing, strength, and wholeness.
For faith, forgiveness, and our church.
For the Lord seeing you safely through another year.
Those are good reasons to give thanks.

But what about for your enemies and those who persecute you?
For discipline, hardship, and difficulties?
For trials and tribulations?
Surely God has blessed you through these things this year as well, as they have caused you to rely on Him, driven you back to God’s Word and prayer, and humbled you in repentance. That these things were the result, thanks be to God.

And then we should give thanks for all that God has done in our world and lives of which we are not even aware.
The accidents He has kept us out of.
The crime and disease He has kept away from us.
The wiles and temptations of the devil He has foiled, and the evil He has not allowed to befall us.
For the protection of His angels.
For His hand leading us and guiding us in the ways we should go.
For these things too, we give thanks.

And then part of our priestly service to our neighbor is to give thanks for him in his place. For how many people in our world will not give thanks to God tonight or tomorrow *or ever*? It is our privilege as Christians to give thanks to God for the blessings He has bestowed not only upon us, but upon others. To acknowledge and praise Him for the work He has done for them and among them, that no good work of God go unthanked. And so for this reason too, we gather this night and give

thanks to God.

And in so doing, we follow the words of the psalmist that we sang tonight:

***I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name
for your steadfast love and your faithfulness . . .***

(Ps 138:2a)

Whatever has come to us or upon us this year, it has come (as the psalmist said) from the ***steadfast love and faithfulness*** of the Lord. And our Lord has worked good through it, whether we realize it or understand how, or not. Faith trusts that ***“all things work together for good for those who love God.”*** (Rom 8:28) All things - no matter how they seem to us. For nothing is impossible for the God who can conceive in a virgin's womb, and give life to the dead. If He can do these things, then surely He can bring good through all the times and circumstances of our lives. And so in all things we will give Him thanks.

Such thinking is what led the apostle Paul to pen the words we heard tonight from Philippians also, when he said: ***“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.”*** Paul teaches us that contentment is born of faith - faith in the steadfast love and faithfulness of God. That whatever comes in our lives is from the hand of our Father in heaven, and so has a reason and a purpose. Such trust then leads to peace and contentment, and that contentment breaks forth in lives of love and thanksgiving. Love in sharing what we have been given with others in thanksgiving to the Giver of all good gifts.

But the psalmist lists another key to thanksgiving as well in this psalm, and it is this:

***for you have exalted above all things
your name and your word.*** (Ps 138:2b)

And where the Lord exalted, or lifted up, His name and His Word was on the cross. The One who bears the holy name, the One who is the Word made flesh, hung there for us and for our salvation, showing us the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord. And ***“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”*** (Rom 8:32) Indeed, He will. All things necessary for our life in this world, and for our salvation for the next. And so forgiven our sins and set free from satan's bondage by the death and resurrection of our brother Jesus, we can now live our lives as thankofferings to our Father in heaven.

And so we give thanks that the steadfast love and faithfulness of God is more than just hanging clothes on our backs, stuffing food in our mouths, putting bigger and better roofs over our heads, and more presents under our trees! We give thanks that the steadfast love and faithfulness of God will always do what is best for us, even when that best is hard. For we have a God who loves us more than what is easy, but all the way to what is hard - all the way to the cross. And even when that means laying crosses on us, to turn us from our evil ways, to live in Him.

And so, as people gather around tables all over the country tomorrow, many will give thanks for the turkey, who gave its life so that we may eat. And after we eat it, the tryptophan in the meat will make us drowsy and we will fall asleep. . . . But as we gather here tonight, around the Table of our Lord, we give thanks to the Son who gave His life so that we may here eat His body and drink His blood - a meal which will *not* put us to sleep, but in fact just the opposite! For this meat and drink *raises* us from the sleep of death and gives us a new life. A new life that will last forever.

And so we lepers return tonight and give thanks - for the cleansing forgiveness of Jesus, for the gift of faith, for the life of the Spirit, for the promise of eternal life, and yes, for all the things in this world and life that our good and gracious Father has provided this year. None of it earned, none of it deserved - all a testament to the steadfast love and faithfulness of God for us in Christ Jesus. For in all things, ***“the Lord will fulfill his purpose for [you and] me.”*** (Ps 138:8a)

And in the end, that is truly the greatest reason to give thanks.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.