

2004 Thanksgiving Service – November 23 & 24, 2004
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

WHAT IS THANKSGIVING? 1 Timothy 6:6-10

What is thanksgiving? It's a time when you get together with family and friends and eat turkey and have a big dinner and watch football games on TV. It's the time of the year when you go deer hunting. But what really is thanksgiving? If you had to explain to a little child what it means to be thankful, how would you do it? To explain what thanksgiving is can be very difficult without using the word thanks or saying thank you. Even when I checked the dictionary the definition for thanksgiving was "An act of giving thanks; an expression of gratitude, especially to God". (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language p. 1333) The writers of the dictionary at least used one other synonym for thanks – gratitude. But for a little child what does that mean?

The word of God before us as we celebrate our National Day of Thanksgiving leads us to ponder the answer to that question – **WHAT IS THANKSGIVING?** As we examine Paul's words to his fellow pastor Timothy we learn that **I) No Contentment – No Thanksgiving**". God also reveals to us **II) Satisfied – you can be thankful.**

NO CONTENTMENT – NO THANKSGIVING

Are you content? Are you happy and satisfied with your lot in life? Am I supposed to be? I thought that you should never be satisfied. You should always want more. You can never have enough. You should always expect to advance and move ahead in life. In other words, I should expect that I would receive a good raise each year that I work for my employer. The more years I work for someone the greater my wage should be. It doesn't make any difference if I need that amount of income to support my family and myself, I should just assume that I should be receiving more and more.

Have you ever noticed that our basic nature is not to be content? We may be continually comparing ourselves to someone else and wondering, "why don't I have what he or she has?" "Why can't I be like that person and have the looks and gifts that he has?" Why? Because I am not that person. God did not give me the same looks; he didn't give me the same abilities. He gave me what I have. He gave me what I need. He has given me the amount of money and income I have because he knows that is what I am able to handle and manage. He may have given someone else a lot more than I have because that person is able to deal with more than I am. God gives each of us what we need.

But now the big question. What do you and I need? Paul tells us. "But if we have food and clothing we will be content with that." (v. 8) We just need food and covering? I thought that I need a lot more than that. Don't I have to have a car? Don't I need a computer, a cell phone, a retirement account; a cottage up north, a DVD player, a CD player, a palm pilot and the list goes on.

We live in a culture, which has led us to believe that to be truly happy and secure, you need all these things. They will give you contentment and security. So we rush off to work, work and work so more so that we can purchase all these things and find true happiness and meaning to our life on this earth. And what happens? Well Paul reminds us of two basic truths. First we came into this world without a stitch of clothes on and when we leave this world which we all will do one day, we are not going to take anything with us. The things of this world cannot give meaning to our existence and they don't provide us any lasting security. Jesus once said, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15) Paul also warns us against the love of money. Notice he does not warn us against money. Money is an inanimate object. It is neither good nor evil. What is dangerous is the love of money.

Paul warns us, “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (Vv.9-10) You and I probably know people who were once close to the Lord. God and his Word were important in their lives. But then they got caught in the trap of accumulating more and more wealth and they no longer had time for the Lord and for hearing his word, their money had become their god. If you are looking for contentment and satisfaction in the things that this world offers, you will never find it and you will never be thankful. Your thankfulness will be always on the basis of comparing yourself with others. It is like the kindergarten teacher who once prayed with her class, “Thank you, Jesus, for all the things we have. Because we know there are so many other children who have no parents, no toys and no clothes and no nice homes.” This prayer says basically we should value our things because many others don’t have them. That doesn’t always inspire gratitude and appreciation but rather can cause us to feel guilty that we have these things and others don’t. Without contentment you often can’t be thankful. You don’t appreciate and value what the Lord has given to you.

SATISFIED – YOU CAN BE THANKFUL

However, when you are satisfied and content, you see all the reasons to be thankful and you appreciate what the Lord has done for you in your life.

Just look at what the Lord has done for each of us. When you and I came into this world, we had nothing. Not only were we naked without a stitch of clothes, we also came into this world not being a member of the family of God. Look at what God has given to us and done for us. He made us members of his family. He grabbed us out of Satan’s clan heading for hell and put us on the path leading to heaven. He gave us the gift of trust and confidence in Jesus as our Savior and Lord. Not only did God make us members of his family. But he has kept us as members of that family. Oh, we often wander and stray and we aren’t the greatest members in this family, but God never gives up on us. He is patient with each one of us not wanting any of us to be lost forever. So daily he comes to us to tell us how much he loves and cares for us. Daily he reminds us, “You have a brother, Jesus, who lived and died and came back to life for you.” Because of what your brother Jesus Christ did for you I forgive and forget all your wanderings and rebellions. I don’t condemn you. I forgive you again and again over and over. My love for you is everlasting. I’m not going to stop loving you. I’m not going to turn my back on you. Oh, you may walk away from me, but I won’t walk away from you. You may make a mess of your life, but I’m not going to remind you of your sins and disobedience. In fact, I will cause all things that happen in your life to work out for your eternal good. I am going to be with you always. Trust me. Oh, you will go through many trials, troubles, sicknesses and sorrows, but don’t despair. I have overcome the world for you. I have conquered your enemies. They have no power over you. They can’t destroy you. I have rescued and saved you. You are mine forever. What a reason to be filled with gratitude and appreciation. What a reason to be thankful!

When you have a right relationship with your Maker and Lord, you can be satisfied. You know where you stand with God. You know where you are going. You are beginning to understand your purpose and meaning on this planet. As you and I have been loved we now can love others freely and openly. We can give to others because the Lord has showered so much upon us. We can do for others. We sit and listen to others. We encourage and give them the same hope and peace we have through God’s all-powerful word that has changed us and can change the lives of others. When we see others in need, we respond, not because we feel guilty or because we think we have to. We naturally do that because we are thankful for what God has done for us.

This also gives us a different perspective on the things that we need for this life. We understand that all we do need is nourishment and covering. We have that. God has provided us with what we need for life and much much more. I don’t have to compare what I have with my neighbor or anyone else. God gives to them what they need, just as he gives to me what I need. And I can be satisfied and thankful. Thankfulness comes when we are satisfied and content. As children of our God we have every reason to be satisfied and content because

we do have what we need for this life and for eternal life with God in heaven. The amazing thing is that we have all this not because we have worked so hard or have earned this on our own. We have it because of the greatness and love of our heavenly Father.

On this Thanksgiving Day, take time to marvel at the amazing kindness of our God. Count the many blessings that God has showered upon you way beyond the nourishment and covering that you need for this life. And say with the psalmist, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." (Psalm 118:1)

Amen.