

Thanksgiving

Preached: 11/22/2020; Thanksgiving Sunday – Germantown;

Welcome:

Welcome to Germantown Church of God. We are located in Cascade, MD. I am Pastor Mark Hosler. I want to thank you for joining me today for this time of Worship, Prayer and the Study of Scripture. I appreciate you taking time for worship. If you would like to learn more about our Church, you can check out our web page, or our Facebook Page.

This Thursday is Thanksgiving Day. As the opening video reminded us, in this challenging year of 2020, Thanksgiving may look and feel different than we are used to. For some people it will be difficult to observe Thanksgiving without a large family gathering, or without a huge meal that we always enjoy. Gathering with a large group of family and friends is discouraged. But Giving Thanks is not “shut down”. I encourage you to push through the disappointment you may feel because of what is going on in our country with the Corona Virus, and take time to reflect on all the blessings you do still enjoy and be thankful to God. Be aware that this is a **season** we are going through. I am confident that it is temporary. We are hopeful that Thanksgivings in the future will be more like the ones we are used to. Thanksgivings in the future could be even better, because of what we are going through this year. So I wish you a blessed holiday.

Scripture (Read in the Sermon) Selected Verses from Psalm 107

Psalm 107:1-9, 41-43

Message

As Christians who are citizens of the United States, we recognize the importance of giving Thanks to God. For the past few weeks we have been talking about **Generosity**. We began this study talking about God’s generosity to us. Our God is a kind, merciful, generous God. As we come to understand God’s generosity, we are challenged to be generous toward others. We talked about that last weekend. That is one way we respond to God’s generosity. Today I want to talk about a second way we respond to God’s generosity which corresponds to this holiday – Thankfulness. We recognize God’s goodness to us and respond with hearts that are overflowing with praise and Thanksgiving. There are many verses that teach us the importance of being Thankful to God in the Bible. Many verses which command us to be Thankful. I came across Psalm 107. It is a challenge to us to remember all that God has done for us, and we are called to respond with Thanksgiving. For many people their Thanksgiving will be limited to thankfulness for material blessings – food, shelter, job, etc. And that is good. We must recognize that all that we have has come to us through the power and kindness of a benevolent, generous God. But this Psalm reminds us to not only be thankful for the material benefits, but for all the ways He responds to us in our times of need.

The Psalm appears to have been written as a hymn of Thanksgiving, after the people of Israel had been in captivity in foreign lands. When they were released to return to their homeland, they responded to God with Thanksgiving and Worship. The Psalm records a series of hardships that the people of Israel had gone through and how God delivered and rescued them from those hardships. I do not know if Psalm 107 inspired the Pilgrims to gather for that first Thanksgiving feast. But the scenarios that are described in the Psalm could have been very familiar to these earliest settlers in the New World.

The Psalm begins with a “Call to Worship” **Read vs. 1-3**. God had entered into a special relationship with the people of Israel. He rescued and delivered them from slavery in the land of Egypt. He made them His people. He promised to be their God and they would be His people. If they faithfully followed His commands, he would protect and provide for them. But if they failed, He would discipline them. They would fall into hardship, at the hands of their enemies. But even in those times of discipline, God would not reject them forever. He would not abandon them. If they returned to Him and reaffirmed their faith and their commitment to be His people He would rescue and deliver them again.

The Psalm begins with an invitation to give thanks. The invitation to give thanks is a familiar one in the book of Psalms. The name of God that is used in this Psalm is the **LORD**. It is a translation of the Hebrew name, YHWH. YHWH was the personal name of God. It is the unique name that identifies Him as the God of the people of Israel. He is not just a nameless Supreme Being. He has a name that they can use to address Him.

The people are reminded that YHWH is a **good God**. This is one of the fundamental attributes of God's character. Sinfulness begins when we doubt God's goodness, when we believe that He is holding out on us. Secondly thanksgiving is called for because **YHWH's love endures forever**. This refers to God's covenantal love, His faithfulness, His commitment to keep His promises to His people.

While the Psalm is a call to the people of Israel to give thanks, ALL PEOPLE who have experienced God's goodness and faithful love, are welcome to join God's covenant people and give thanks to God. The Redeemed of the Lord includes all those who have experienced His deliverance – whether it is spiritual, psychological, or material.

The Psalm then records various scenarios where His people have experienced God's redemption and deliverance. We won't read the entire Psalm, but I will read the first scenario, recorded in **verses 4-9**. He writes of those who had been forced to wander in wastelands, in deserts and wilderness. They were removed far from their homes, far from places that were familiar to them. They looked for a "Safe place" to settle and dwell (Home). They experienced hunger and thirst, and it felt as if their life was ebbing away. But as they wandered, they cried out to the Lord and He delivered them from their distress. He straightened the road before them, so they weren't going around in circles. He brought them "home" to a place where they could settle. He brought them to a city where they would experience safety, where they would have access to the things they needed for life. SO the people are called on to **Give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind**. He satisfied their thirst and hunger for good things.

As I said, the scenarios that are recorded in this Psalm may have sounded familiar to those early settlers who attended that Thanksgiving Feast – wandering, far from home, hungry and thirsty. But they were convinced that God had rescued them, delivered them. He brought them to safety. And in return for God's goodness to them, they felt that it was important for them to give thanks to God who had come to their rescue. After the successful corn harvest of 1621, Governor Bradford called for a Feast of Thanksgiving. They invited their new friends to join them, and they celebrated God's goodness for 3 days.

As the Psalm continues there are more "reversals" of fortunes. The Psalmist writes about those who were trapped in the darkness of prison; some were afflicted because they had followed a pathway of sinfulness; some were afflicted on a sea voyage, tossed up and down by the waves, fearing for their survival. But the cycle is repeated – despair, crying out to the Lord, redemption and deliverance, resulting in a call to **"give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind."**

The Psalm concludes with a challenge to the reader (**Read vs. 41-43**). Consider these experiences that God's people have gone through, and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord. As we express our words of Thanks in the coming week, let us reflect on what these acts of Thanksgiving mean. If Thanksgiving is only an opportunity to feel good about ourselves and all that we have, then we will have missed much of the significance of the day. The act of Giving Thanks must

- Challenge us from becoming **secularized**, thinking that material things, life in this world is all there is. There is no God, there is nothing more to life than eat, drink and be merry.
- Remind us that there is a God who cares for us and provides for us.
- It must break down feelings of self-confidence and self-sufficiency. Apart from Him we are nothing and can do nothing
- Must instruct us to live our lives in submission to Him and His will for us.

As I think about this act of deliverance by God of His people Israel, of the earliest settlers in Massachusetts, I am wondering if some of you might feel drawn into the story yourself. Perhaps you never experienced the physical danger that the people of Israel, or pilgrims faced, but you know what it is like to be wandering through wastelands. You know what it is like to be in a place – physically, emotionally, spiritually – where you do not feel settled, where you do not feel safe and free. I encourage you to look to the Lord, call out to Him, and trust Him to redeem and deliver you. As you experience His rescue, may your heart overflow with Thanksgiving again.