

**First Lesson: 2 Corinthians 9:6-9**

**Second Lesson: Psalm 65**

**The Gospel: Luke 17**

**Thanksgiving Service**

**November 26, 2020**

**“An American Festival of Thanksgiving”  
Sermon Preached by Lowell D. Nelson  
American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Gratitude is at the heart of every relationship. Gratitude to God. Gratitude for those who serve, and gratitude to be alive in this time and in this place. Gratitude is something that needs to be taught. If you remember little two-year-olds, whether your own or your grandchildren, that’s what comes packaged with, me – mine, they need to be taught to say please and thank you.

It’s the same for us as people of faith to be reminded of this attitude of gratitude as it has been discussed over these years, but an expression, not just the attitude, but the expression of gratitude to give love in what we say and how we approach life. There are so many gifts to life. Yet, sometimes we tire of these gifts and certainly if not understanding well the love of God and the love of country, we can become cynical, almost tired of the amazing gifts because of our focus becoming more and more closed that only we see life through our eyes instead of the great diversity and beauty of God’s gifts and the gifts of our country. Tired of gifts, who would ever do such a thing?

I was thinking about a beautiful young woman who is engaged to a man who just absolutely loves everything about her, including a beautiful little birthmark. It is so wonderful, so beautiful, so distinctive. He loves her for it. But if he doesn’t keep gratitude at the center of his relationship, as the years go by, 10, 20, 30, perhaps 40 years, and this beautiful little birthmark now resembles something else. He might say, “When are you going to get that thing removed?” He’s forgotten about the power of the gift. It’s the relationship and expressing that.

Now, I’ll make fun of guys too. So a woman falls in love with her fiancé, because he appreciates her cooking so well. As a sign that he has eaten fully, he might loosen the belt just a little bit after the dinner. She thinks it is cute and how wonderful it is that somebody appreciates her food, but if he keeps that up over the years, and keeps on loosening his belt, and more and more casually, she just might say, “Dear Lord, belt up, what are you doing?”

I hope that the people we absolutely love the most, if we don’t keep the relationship at the center, the gratitude that we have for the love of someone so dear to us, we can move into the strange cynical way of approaching life. Every generation goes through its challenges, we are going through ours. But let us never be tired of the gifts that God has given to us. God of our salvation, you are the hope of all to the ends of earth and the furthest seas is the way that Psalm 65 proclaims it. It is a message of proclamation, oh God of healing.

Second Corinthians 9 speaks about a God who is so generous. You have heard these words the one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, but the one who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. We think about that and use it as encouragement for our own life. If you play it close to the vest, if you keep everything, the word scrooge comes to mind. You need a reformation to open yourself to the amazing blessings that God can pour through you because at the center of the message of Thanksgiving is how bountiful God is to us.

God does not sew in a sparingly way, he is marvelous with the gifts of the means of grace, of hope and salvation through Jesus Christ and all of the gifts that come with this. But we as people of faith, remember to keep our focus on the relationship with the giver. Not so much on the gifts, those are expressions in which we give thanks, but it is in Thanksgiving to the giver and God is able to provide us with every blessing in abundance so that we have enough. That's an interesting way to stop, isn't it – that we have enough. Many of us are consumers, we are driven by what we see, but we have enough of everything, of everything that is important. That is love, so that with this we share abundantly in every good work.

When Jesus healed lepers, it did have a subtly to it. The subtly was the protocol was to go to the priests at the temple and to go through a ritual of cleansing for being a leper. It would take time, focus, and energy, and the priests engaged in the work of salvation. But as the 10 were going, one of them paid attention. I don't know how simple it was to look at one's hands or to have feeling regained in one's feet, or the emphasis on paying attention to their healing. Nine, who knows what happened to them, but one paid attention to the healing and returned and gave thanks to God. If you don't get the power of the story, it wasn't even one of the insiders, part of the religious team, it was someone known as a foreigner. The good Samaritan so to speak. The one who didn't know better. Yet he was the one that was responding. "And your faith made you well" is the cry there by Jesus. To me, that wellness comes in the proclamation and proclaiming gratitude to God. As you know, it wasn't his faith, I got enough faith and now I'm healed; he was healed and his faith allows him to express this healing.

Expression of gratitude, that's my encouragement for all of us this Thanksgiving season and every day. If Thanksgiving is the one day in which we express gratitude – shame on us. Life is so much fuller of gratitude for God's blessings for the people in our life. It says in the scripture, "Give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything." I think that covers it – all times, everything in the name of Jesus Christ. I do encourage you on a daily basis, perhaps at the beginning and at the end of the day to express your gratitude to God for the relationship through Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thanksgiving to God our Father.

It's a great way to describe the strength of relationship; and there are plenty of things, sure, but to me, the emphasis is on the relationship with God. And to say "Thank you Lord for the love ones in my life." To treat those nearest to you with the gratitude of the depth and power and salvation found in healing relationships. That can be new relationships for those who have just come into your life, or for those who have been with you lifelong. Thank you God for the

sustaining nature of relationships. I really do believe that when we express gratitude to God and to one another, we have the opportunity to hear it from others for our own life. To really notice the healing and the salvation that comes from hearing words of affirmation from others. It's a difficult time, many of us are focused on getting through this season of pandemic concern, yes signs of great hope are coming, but still a focus and we need to hear the message of God's love for us. That's my job, but not only limited to me, is to proclaim the love of God to all people. That is your job also, and to receive that love from others.

I want to just make brief mention of this. These are difficult times, if you are not feeling thankful, that is a human response to the circumstances in which we live. This is the encouragement for us. Our country has been through tough times before. In 1863 Abraham Lincoln in a proclamation of Thanksgiving during the middle of the Civil War, what strength gave him that. Was it just pure politics or was he actually articulating gratitude at the heart of the relationship with God and the relationship we have with one another? I encourage you to look that up, it's not so long. Speeches have become longer I think over the years. Abraham Lincoln was succinct and direct in his words, but he said it in such a simple sentence. All the things that are going well, he said it this way "No human council have devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things." These are great gifts of the most High God, even in the midst of the Civil War.

Even in the midst of the pandemic. The message of hope, the message of love is that gratitude strengthens the heart of every relationship. Express your gratitude to God through your prayers, through your offerings, through your very living of life, as a gratitude of God's abundant blessings. Would you do this? If you do not yet have this practice, I want you to do it. Around the Thanksgiving table, whoever is assembled, I know it hurts that often it is going to be a smaller crew, but through Zoom or other technologies through the phone, to express gratitude for the people in your life. Especially, not the things that they do, but for your gratitude that they are a gift to your life by the very relationship. Your spouse, your children, your grandchildren, friends, family extended, strengthen these bonds, express your gratitude and make this Thanksgiving a statement, an articulation of faith. I am so thankful for our emphasis on gratitude for our country and that patriotic theme that we have. Thank you God for the United States of America! God, bless our country to be a blessing. Happy Thanksgiving! Happy Thanksgiving with the power of gratitude, loving God, loving one another. Amen