

Giving Thanks for Our Salvation – Deuteronomy 8:1-10
(Philippians 4:6-20; Luke 17:11-19)
Eve of National Thanksgiving
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Our Redeemer Lutheran Church – Emmett, Idaho
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Lord Jesus Christ. Our text for this evening is from the Old Testament reading from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy.

For the people of our land, the entire month of November tends to be a busy time. We elect new leaders and officials, honor our veterans, wrap up the high school football season, and of course, we sanctify a Thursday as a day of thanksgiving for all of our many blessings. It is a national holiday, to be sure, but nonetheless it based in the idea of giving thanks to God for blessing and sustaining us with all that we need. Of course, you know as well as I do that many in our present modern society would rather thank their lucky stars than the Almighty God, but it doesn't change the fact that Thanksgiving Day has faith-based roots in the English Puritans who gave thanks to the LORD for seeing them through their tumultuous first year in the New World nearly four hundred years ago. And while our nation, at least in the public sphere, has turned this day into a day of thanksgiving without specifying whom we thank, as Christians we have no problem giving thanks to our gracious God, who led the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and likewise led us out of bondage to sin through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In our text for this evening, Moses is commanding the sons of Israel to remember all that the LORD their God had done for them. He brings to the forefront the great deeds of the LORD in bringing Israel out of Egypt as promised, and for the manna he provided them in the wilderness. Moses frequently pointed to such events when addressing his people. And it was not because he wanted just to talk about them! No, he had to constantly remind the Israelites of the LORD's grace and mercy to them. For they were indeed "a stubborn and stiff-necked people" as Moses declared in the Scriptures. Even after forty years of wandering in the wilderness so that all those who had done evil in the sight of the LORD would die off, their descendants were no better. They, too, grumbled at the mere sight of difficulty and want. They, too, failed to keep the LORD's commandments, even when they knew that they were being tested. As the chosen people of God, they were no better than the uncircumcised heathen when it came to giving God his due honor.

But despite all of their shortcomings, the LORD remained patient. While the Old Testament speaks of unimaginable displays of God's wrath and hot displeasure, his patience coupled with his grace and mercy is all that kept Israel together. It was purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in them that the Lord GOD sustained his people. In so doing, our heavenly Father throughout time guided the generations of Israel to

the reign of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, who would oversee the crucifixion of the Son of God who had come in the flesh to dwell with his people and bear the weight and penalty of the sins of the entire human race. Whether they realized it or not, the children of Israel had much to be thankful for.

Throughout the generations, Israel was not exactly a model for godly and obedient living. In fact, there is little wonder that Jesus used the Shepherd-Sheep analogy when speaking of himself and his people. Like sheep, the Israelites continually went astray and needed to be gathered and herded in the pasture of their lands. They were disobedient and never ceased to test their Shepherd's patience. And, as we heard in the reading, he disciplined them as a man disciplines his son. Yet every time he did this, he remained long-suffering for their sake, and he reminded them that his chastening was for their own good.

This is what we have heard in the text. Moses here reminds the sons of Israel of their hardships during the exodus from Egypt. As recorded in the Book of Exodus, he reminds them of their great hunger from which God rescued them through manna falling from heaven. He humbled them and tested their hearts, whether or not they would keep his commandments.

This was the ultimate test. For, in order to be ready to hear and obey God, sinful man must fully and utterly despair of himself. He must look outside of himself and his own strength. This is how the LORD chastened his people and repeatedly brought them closer to him when they strayed from the path he chose for them. They had to recognize that, indeed, man does not live by bread alone, but rather by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

They had to recognize that, while they hungered in the desert, the LORD did not let them perish, but he sustained them by his power and might, even without food! Yet they continued to grumble against him. What a gracious God he is, who cares for the needs of his people and rescues them not on the basis of their behavior, but on the basis of his love for them! Such is our God, who in Christ Jesus has rescued us from the power of sin, death, and the devil.

When our Lord Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, he remained there forty days and forty nights and was tempted by the devil. Scripture tells us that he hungered, and Satan tempted him with his hunger. He told him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." But Jesus here quoted the words of Moses from Deuteronomy, saying "It is written, that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." This was the whole point of being led in the wilderness without food—to trust in God alone for his needs. As the Son of God, he could easily have turned the stones into bread and nourished his famished body. But he teaches us, in quoting this text from Moses, that we are to trust in and give thanks to God at all times, both in scarcity and abundance. We should thank and praise him for fulfilling all of our daily needs, for he has blessed each one of us with, as Luther points out in the Small Catechism, clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all that we have. He richly and daily provides us with everything we need to support our bodies and lives.

As we celebrate this day of national thanksgiving—as we travel to visit our loved ones and reflect upon our many blessings by partaking of unusual amounts of food (putting on the first few of the several pounds that the average American puts on between now and New Year’s!), let us give thanks to him who has sustained our lives. Let us give thanks to him who, though there be wars and rumors of wars, tribulation and persecution, will never abandon his people. Let us give thanks to him who has given us the precious gift of his word that makes us wise unto salvation in Christ Jesus!