

Deuteronomy 8:1-10 – November 27, 2019 (Thanksgiving Eve)

It used to be unthinkable but, now, it's become commonplace: stores are open on Thanksgiving Day. Best Buy, Bed Bath and Beyond, J.C. Penney's, Kmart, Kohl's, Macy's, Old Navy, Sears, Target, Walmart. They will all be open for some length of time on Thanksgiving Day.

What used to be a holiday to stop and give thanks for our many blessings has become a day to stop and shop. Because, apparently, we don't have enough. We need more. And more. And more. Forget the Norman Rockwell painting of a family gathered around an impossibly large turkey. Thanksgiving in 2019 features a family huddled in line to buy a television on sale for 60% off.

And I'd like to blame the stores for this, but they're just responding to demand. They wouldn't pay their employees time-and-a-half or more on Thanksgiving Day if they weren't absolutely sure that the store would be full of customers.

Which is kind of ironic, when you think about it. The very people shopping on Thanksgiving Day are often the people most in need of Thanksgiving Day. Most in need of a day to stop working. Stop shopping. Stop focusing on all that they want. And start focusing on all that they have. And on the God who has given it to them.

But then again, that's really nothing new. It's really the core message of our Old Testament Lesson today. Here we have the Israelites on the very border of Canaan, the Promised Land. They've been traveling for forty years now. Not because it actually takes forty years to go from Egypt to Canaan. But because God required that they wait forty years before entering.

Wait for an entire generation of leaders to die off. Leaders who had doubted God's ability to protect them. Leaders who were infested with Egyptian mythology and superstition. Leaders who really couldn't lead.

And for forty years, God had raised up a new generation of leaders. Men who had learned that when they were hungry, God would provide food. When they were thirsty, God would provide water. When they were in danger, God would protect them. And when they were rebellious, God would punish them.

In a very real way, God had taken everything from them so that He might be everything to them. And in large part, it had worked. The Israelites were stronger and more faithful than they had been when they left Egypt. They knew the challenges they faced in Canaan. And they were ready to meet them head on.

But then in this passage God stops and He warns them: it won't last. For the last forty years, you obeyed me because you didn't have a choice. You ate manna because it was all I gave you to eat. You drank water from a rock because it was the only water I gave you to drink. You obeyed my commands because if you didn't, you'd be left helpless in the desert.

But now you're entering Canaan. And it's a good land. There's food and there's water. There's rivers and springs. Wheat and barley. Fruit and vines. Olives and honey. Iron and copper.

And now the real test begins. Will you stop and remember who gave all this to you? Or will you forget me? Will you take even a few moments when you sit down to eat to bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you? Or will you simply dwell on how much more you want?

You see, that's another irony of human nature. The more you have, the more you want. When they were in the desert they could only want as much as the Lord chose to give them. Which was exactly what they needed and no more.

But in Canaan, they could want and want and want. They could fill their lives with greed and luxury and a desire for more. Until it consumed their every thought. Until even a day of thanksgiving could be transformed into a day of avarice and materialism.

The truth is that we sinful human beings aren't real good at this whole thanksgiving thing. Even if we're not shopping on Thanksgiving Day. Even if we say a prayer before every meal we eat. That was only the bare minimum that God desired from his people.

In his explanation of the First Article of the Creed, Luther writes: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life."

How many of you wake up each morning saying, "Thank you Lord that I can see. That I can hear. That I have arms and legs. That I can think. And feel. And taste and smell."

And then you go and put on your clothes and say, "Thank you God for my clothes and shoes." You go to breakfast and say, "Thank you God for these eggs and this glass of orange juice." And then you head off to work, and as you stand at the door and say goodbye to your family, you think, "Thank you God for this house around me and for the land it sits on and for my wife and my kids."

And then you go out to your car and you say, "Thank you for this car. And for roads to drive on. And for a safe community. And for businesses to fill my needs. And for my job to provide me an income. And for the rain and the snow and the sun and the grass and the trees –" and on and on and on.

The truth is that it all comes from God. It is all a gift from him. And it is all so easily forgotten and taken for granted. We take one day a year to give thanks, but for God, every day is Thanksgiving Day. And every day that we don't give him thanks for each and every one of his blessings is a day that we've gone shopping instead of being grateful for all that we've been given.

Which is why we are gathered here. Not to give God thanks as some sort of extra-special gift to Him. But to give Him thanks as a meager, long-overdue confession from a sinful heart that doesn't give Him thanks nearly enough. To give Him thanks even as we hear how He took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to His disciples. How He took the cup, gave thanks, and shared it, promising them that it was given for the forgiveness of all their sins.

We gather and we hear how our Lord gave thanks for everything, even the breaking of his own body and the shedding of his own blood. And he did it all on our behalf. So that we could eat and drink and remember all that our Lord has given to us. Not just our life, but His life. Not just our family, but His family. Not just our food, but His food. And not just our home, but His eternal home.

You see, even if we did give thanks every day for every good gift from our Father in heaven, we would still leave out all the eternal blessings He has promised us. Blessings we can only hope for with anticipation and joy. Blessings he has already begun to pour out on us by giving us this supper. By making us His holy people.

And by promising that everything we do with thanks is made holy. Did you know that? 1 Timothy 4 tells us, "*For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*"

We're not just holy people eating holy food when we eat at the Lord's Table. We're holy people eating holy food around our dinner table as well, if we eat with thanksgiving. We're holy people living in holy homes, if we live in thanksgiving. We're holy people raising holy families, if we raise them with thanksgiving.

That is the wonder of God's love. He takes our ungratefulness and covers over all its sin. He takes our gratefulness and transforms it into something so powerful, it can actually fill our lives with His holiness. He takes our meager, long-overdue, bare minimum thankfulness and turns it into a fragrant offering. A sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

And He brings us into His Promised Land. Not a land where we are fed with food to the point of greed and luxury, like the Israelites entered. But a land where we are fed by His Word. Until we eat and are full, and bless the Lord our God for all that He has given us. Amen.