

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
Thanksgiving, 2018

“Time to Give Thanks”
WHAT A RICH FEAST BEFORE US TODAY!

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Do we SEE it? God's rich feast before us today? Or are we distracted just a bit by the awesome meal waiting for us at home? A traditional feast of Roasted-Pumpkin Guacamole, Cilantro-Lime Rubbed Turkey, Chorizo-Stuffed Squash, Chipotle-Cream Cheese Pumpkin Pie!

No? How about Lentil Loaf with Vegan Gravy, Cranberry Pear Sauce, Butternut Squash Chili, Festive Chickpea Tart, Roasted Carrots Quinoa Bowl?

No? Let's try Roasted Turkey, Mashed Potatoes, Butternut Squash, Cranberry Sauce, Green Beans with those Onion Rings, Dinner Rolls, Pumpkin Pie with a dollop of Cool Whip?

Yes? Ding, ding, ding! Did you see YOUR feast? We come from different backgrounds—experiences and culture, palate preferences and what qualifies as a feast. But isn't there a common ingredient for the feast of *thanks-giving* for ALL of God's people? Don't we celebrate the blessings of our Triune God? **One** Giver of the daily bread, the Father. **One** Lord of salvation, the Son. **One** Maestro of the spiritual kitchen whipping up daily, spiritual food, the Spirit! What a feast before us today! Let's take a look at God's menu, and as we do so, let us begin with prayer: *Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.*

1. GOD'S PROMISES of “DAILY BREAD”

When I was a kid, Thanksgiving happened at grandma's house (grandpa lived there, too, but it was still “grandma's”). And when I was a kid, Thanksgiving was often about the “daily bread”—what I was going to eat! Grandma's apple pie was my target, but you had to be polite and eat the meal first. So, next on my hit list was grandma's stuffing--the kind with pork sausage, raisins and apple. I couldn't get enough! Heading to the farm, I lived in glorious anticipation of the stuffing, my “daily bread” from the Almighty!

WHAT are you gunnin' for today? A little cranberry sauce? Pumpkin pie? White meat? Dark meat? Snicker apple salad? (Dessert in the middle disguised as a salad--splendid!)

Did we catch God's menu priority for us when our sermon text was read? ***“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors.”*** Not pie; not stuffing—but God's promises!

To ancient Israel, the promise looked like this: “Be faithful in following your God and you will experience the blessings I have promised. You will be as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give you the promised land of Canaan.” It was way too tempting for Israel to see this as a “daily bread promise” ONLY.

For US today, the promise SOUNDS similar: “Be faithful in following your God and you will experience the blessings I have promised. You will be a people purchased with my blood from every tribe and language and nation, and I will give you the Promised Land of heaven!”

Where is our “daily bread” in this promised care of our God--the stuffing, the turkey? Well, it is not quite an afterthought; God knows we need it. But notice where Jesus places it on the prayer menu he gave us--the FOURTH petition of the Lord’s Prayer! The three petitions on *spiritual things* coming first are his reminder that we live *primarily* on every word that comes from the mouth of God!

APPLICATION With that in mind, it is healthy for us to plan our Thanksgiving feasts to be more than “daily bread feasts” that look *BACK* in time and *DOWN* with thanksgiving for earthly blessings. We are also privileged to look *FORWARD* and up, feasting with anticipation on the promises of God! So welcome to worship this day and to this first course of your Thanksgiving meal!

Isn’t it true that you and I have a feast every time we walk into our house of worship and sit at God’s table? We come to feast on the promises of our God!

- Promises credible and nourishing because of the track record of the Giver—“never will I leave you”—and he hasn’t!
- Promises inspiring hope and joy because of the heart of the Giver—“I will send my Son to remove your sin,”—and he did!
- Weekly specials—spiritual food that challenges our living, prompts our thinking, informs our planning. The Bread of Life always the focus; his gospel the heart of all we do!

We pastors wait on tables at this feast—a joyful task! We are tasked with the “presentation” of the good news of Jesus Christ, preached with hope and joy! God’s words for living are the rich side dishes that flow from Jesus’ victory over sin and death—a rich feast that causes us to say, “Thank you, God!”

2. GOD’S LOVE in the CHALLENGES

Now some of us might be balking just a bit as we hear God’s *feast of blessing* presented on a plate of hope and joy! We acknowledge it, but we are struggling to embrace it. “Where is God’s love in life’s REAL challenges? There are hurts in ME you cannot see. My struggles with God of which you are unaware. *God’s Promises Smothered In Hope?! Not always seen it!*”

Let's switch analogies for a moment. What are some qualities of a good athletic coach?

- “Growth comes in success and in failure.”
- “No pain no gain is the way to train.”
- “Remember to celebrate the little successes.”

A great coach knows the game and how to win. A great coach knows it's only a game and not ALL about winning. Yet a great coach knows it is still about *trying* to win and what it takes to get there.

The great coach has conditioning drills that test her players, stretch her players--driving them to the edge of their abilities. The great coach has a pizza party after a loss, recognition of every player for contribution and growth—inspiring hope! Do we know that our God is a great coach?

“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

The LORD IS a great coach—always teaching and developing. Someone once said, “Trouble arises when people enjoy prosperity so much that they forget the God who gave it to them.” So the LORD coached Israel and he coaches you and me, with just enough struggle to focus us on what truly matters.

When I was a kid, I didn't care for butternut squash, but mom would say, “Give Nathan some squash; it's good for him.” I fretted. I rebelled. I belly-ached. But today at the feast, “please pass the squash” flows easily from these lips. I learned to like it, and it is good for me. (Better than snicker apple salad?)

Like mom, the LORD challenged and *stretched* Israel on a regular basis. He used hunger in the belly to remind them of his desire to serve, to remind them of his heart to give life eternal! Good coaching--good parenting—we learn it from him! ***Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.”***

APPLICATION In my service at Wisconsin Lutheran College, I got to know some amazing students—some sitting here today! Jeremiah Cady was one of them. A brother in Christ. A Fox Valley Lutheran High School grad. A company commander for the United States Army in Afghanistan.

Jeremiah walked into my office on November 7, 2012. He presented me with this patch. It was awarded to him for leadership upon graduation from Infantry School at Fort Benning, GA. A soldier's sword and the words "Follow Me".

Jeremiah walked in as he always did, leaning on his cane. Sitting, he would adjust his back brace. I believe an improvised explosive device had gone off as he led his soldiers. Down he went. Home he came. Forever changed! But all good. Jeremiah had been trained by the army to fight to survive, but he has been tempered by his Savior in the fires of war to not only survive, but to thrive in Jesus' victory, resurrection to life. God's love that can never be taken away! Jeremiah would say that this life had taken something from him—yet daily Jesus gives him everything he needs. Jeremiah sees the halls of heaven. Jeremiah smells the banquet feast. He sees a future walk without pain, without cane. Hope fills his heart daily as he feasts on the love of his God in the midst of the struggle...

Jeremiah gave me his patch to thank me for inspiring others to hear the voice of Jesus, "Just follow me." And to Jeremiah I said, "Back at you brother, for inspiring me!" So, please pass the squash. I think it is good for me!"

3. GOD'S FAITHFULNESS in the Thanks-giving

You are done with the feast...your stomach is full...you need nothing more. But the blessings keep coming! Dutch apple pie has been waiting for you! Warm from the stovetop...real whipped cream! "Dear Lord Jesus, thank you! You are beyond faithful! Your blessing overflows in my life—even when I fail to see!"

God reminded Israel of his faithfulness in the midst of their hard journey. ***"During those 40 years in the wilderness your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell. So when the LORD your God brings you into this good land, remember my faithfulness. When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you."***

It is a gift to daily see the feast of God's blessings. If the front wall of church symbolizes eternity and ALL of God's blessings, then know that the God of the feast always does his work in our lives from that eternal perspective. This dot is our life of 40, 60, 80 years. God is always working from HERE to bring us out of HERE to the feast in the banquet hall of heaven.

My problem is that NOW I get caught up in the brussels sprouts served up as part of God's feast. "I don't like brussels sprouts, Lord. They don't taste good." I obsess, I whine—failing to remember my lessons of the persistent, ever-present, blessings of my God. In Israel's case, clothes that NEVER wore out; feet that did not swell!

You and I have such clothes! Christ's forgiveness for sin given in our baptisms! You and I have such spiritual feet—no swelling on the journey because Jesus walks ahead! When the way is steep,

he pulls me up. When the way is rocky, he takes my hand! When the way is dreary and dark, his voice lights the way, his promises bringing the encouragement I need!

One day, we know, our journey will take us from this life into that banquet hall of heaven! We will be there because Jesus has walked ahead on the eternal journey, too! He faced his Father's judgment for our sin. Our sin took his life from him! But he, in turn, took back his life only to share it with you and with me by faith! Blessing that continues to flow!

“Yes, Jesus, I would love some of your Father's Dutch apple pie always sitting there for me. And while you are at it, Lord, some more brussels sprouts, too...? I trust you!”

APPLICATION Pastor Pete first shared this story...shared again in brief because...well...it fits. A true story.

The old pastor, from his bed, looked at his preacher sons. There was no miraculous cure waiting for him. The doctors had said in their own way, “You are not going to survive this. You are going home.” The father shared the prognosis with his sons. There were tears in all of their eyes...but a smile on his face! “I have never felt so free,” he said. “All I have to do is sit here and wait for Jesus to come and take me home!”

The Dutch apple pie of God's blessings had been waiting on the stovetop all through the years—just for him. His “clothes” were clean and pressed; his feet fitted and ready with the gospel of peace. One feast almost over; a new feast about to begin! No brussels sprouts; just the presence of God! What a feast of *thanks-giving* THAT will be!

CONCLUSION Let us close our meal together with prayer: “Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good and his mercy endures forever.” Amen.

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