

Be Thankful.

Text: Col. 3:12-15

Suggested Hymns:

566, 561, 464, 567, 563

- 1) To Be Thankful Is Our Duty
- 2) To Be Thankful Is to Be Christ-like
- 3) To Be Thankful Is to Be Content
- 4) Thanksgiving Will Be Our Chief Occupation
In Heaven

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Colossians 3:12-15, ¹² *Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;* ¹³ *bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*

¹⁴ *But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.* ¹⁵ *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

By the grace of God, the Apostle Paul practiced what he preached. He was not only a hearer of the Word, but also a doer. His challenge to the Corinthians, *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ* was no idle talk or empty sound. In other words, “Be followers of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

By word and deed he always set an example for the believers to follow. By his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his love for the brethren he always set before the followers of Jesus Christ a pattern which they may well copy.

What an example for us to follow! In several of his letters he speaks of himself as *“a bondservant¹ of Jesus Christ.”* From the moment of his conversion on the road to Damascus to the time of his martyrdom under blood thirsty Nero one question was constantly uppermost in his mind: *“Lord, what will You have me to do?”*² That should also be the question that we ask each day, *“Lord, what will You have me to do?”*

All of his abilities and talents of body, mind, and spirit were completely and always dedicated to Jesus who died and rose for him. With Paul it was Christ — Christ first, Christ last, Christ all the time.

Christian courage is certainly needed today — courage to confess Christ and His Gospel before friend and foe, courage to face trials and bear the burdens of life manfully. Here, too, the Apostle Paul may well serve as our example and pattern.

He said in Romans 1:16, ¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.* He was never ashamed of anything which the Gospel gave him to do. Before kings and rulers, before men of high and low degree, before Jews and Gentiles, he never compromised or swerved for a moment, but gave the disciples an example of unflinching fidelity to the Gospel.

His lion-hearted bravery is evident, for instance, from his reply to kind-hearted friends at Caesarea who tried to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. We read in Acts 21:13, ¹³ *Then Paul answered, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

In his readiness and willingness to thank and praise God for all His goodness and mercy the Apostle sets a high and holy example before us. He had a deep and abiding appreciation of God’s mercy toward him, and he never could sufficiently thank and praise God.

When he reflected how marvellously the risen Lord and Saviour had led and directed him, who once had been a blasphemer and a persecutor, he paused to praise God and said in 1 Timothy 1:12, ¹² *And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.*

Often in his letters to congregations and co-workers he first of all gives thanks to God for the many evidences of God’s love and mercy toward him and his converts! In the morning when he awoke, at night when he went to bed, in prosperity or adversity, in prison or out of prison, always and everywhere Paul found a long list of blessings for which to give thanks.

On this Harvest Thanksgiving Day, Paul, across the centuries, calls to us, who are privileged to live in this richly blessed land, *To Be Thankful*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. To Be Thankful Is Our Duty

“Be thankful.” Why? In St. Mary’s Church at Cambridge, England, there is a hassock with these words embroidered on it: “Think — Thank!”

If we, the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ and the heirs of everlasting life, stopped to think more of God’s mercy and love toward us, we would thank more.

If we paused to think, we would be ready to acknowledge in word and deed that *“it is truly fitting and right, and for our lasting good that we should at all times, and in all places give thanks to Thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”*

If we paused on this Harvest Thanksgiving Day in our churches and in our homes to think how the Lord in heaven has again showered upon us as a nation and as a people so many and such rich gifts, then we would be ready to confess with Luther, *“for all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.”*

We read in *Luther’s Small Catechism*, the First article of the Apostles’ Creed, **I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.**

What does this mean? I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers.

What does this mean? He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from every evil. All this He does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

Today we especially think of the many earthly blessings with which our Father in heaven has again surrounded us and our loved ones in such rich and abundant measure! Food, the harvest of the land, in such quantity and variety that even kings with all their wealth and power never dreamed of years ago. Food graces the average Australian table three times each day.

Think of the many modern conveniences and comforts and luxuries that surround us in our daily life! Think of all the electrical appliances in the home. Think of transport in cars, boats, trains and planes. Think of all the sealed roads and highways we have today compared to 50 years ago. Think of all the handy tools we have in the home and at work. Think of all the battery powered devices we have these days. Think of all the new farm machinery available today.

Then think also of the minerals of the earth that are mined in Australia and provide work for people. Think of the water we have on this planet. Then think also of the things in nature which make our lives so enjoyable, rivers, lakes, animals, flowers, vegetables and fruits. Think of the communication devices we have today compared to years ago. We can virtually talk to anyone anywhere in the world or send pictures to each other through the air.

Think also of housing and clothing, home and family and friends. Now, for every word “think” we have just heard we should replace with the word “thank.” We could never thank God enough for what He has done for each and every one of us. Truly, God has richly and daily provided us with everything that we need for the support of the body.

Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This applies especially and above all to the many spiritual blessings we enjoy and possess. We are privileged to hear the preaching and teaching of God’s Word in all its fullness, truth, and purity Sunday after Sunday.

The message that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, is faithfully brought to us through Word and Sacrament. Our hungry souls can feast upon the Bread of Life. The Water of Life quenches our thirsting souls. Our children and young people are taught *The One Thing Needful*.

While many people in other countries in the world are denied these rights and privileges, we are permitted to have and exercise them without fear or hindrance.

When we think about these and many other blessings, surely we must wish to heed the invitation of the Apostle when he bids us, ***“Be thankful.”*** To be thankful is our duty.

2. To Be Thankful Is to Be Christ-like

“Be thankful.” Why? To be thankful is to be Christ-like. To be thankful is to follow in His steps. To be thankful is to do as Jesus did.

When Jesus fed the four thousand, He took the seven loaves and first of all gave thanks.³ When in the Upper Room He instituted the Holy Supper, giving with the bread and cup His body and blood for His disciples, He first gave thanks.⁴ When Jesus fed the five thousand, John reminds us that Jesus first gave thanks.⁵ When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He said, as we read in John 11:41, ***Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.***

Since we are His followers, then we should follow Jesus in this respect also and be thankful. Since Jesus gave thanks, surely there are many reasons why we, the children of our Father in heaven, in and through faith in Jesus Christ, should also give thanks.

Since Jesus, the God-Man, who owns the sheep and the cattle upon a thousand hills, gave thanks, how much more should we, His creatures, pour out our hearts in songs and hymns of praise and thanksgiving! To be thankful is to be Christ-like.

3. To Be Thankful Is to Be Content

“Be thankful.” Why? To be thankful is to be content. To be content is to be happy. The thankful person is happy in his contentment. Paul was always thankful, hence, content and happy. He could write to the Philippians, as we read in Philippians 4:11, ***for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.*** Murmuring never rose from his lips. Complaining was foreign to his spirit. He was not envious of his neighbour.

One hymnist expressed both the unthankfulness and the thankfulness of some people this way:⁶

Some murmur when their sky is clear
And wholly bright to view,
If some small speck of dark appear
In their great heaven of blue;

And some with thankful love are filled
If but one streak of light,
One ray of God's good mercy, gild
The darkness of their night.

What a contrast!

Fulton Oursler, in one of his books, tells of his old nurse, who was born a slave and who had attended the birth of his mother and his own birth. She taught him his greatest lesson in giving thanks.

"I remember her as she sat at the kitchen table in our house; the hard, old, brown hands folded across her starched apron, the glistening black eyes lifted to the white-washed ceiling, and the husky, old, whispering voice, saying, '*Much obliged, Lord, for my vittles.*'"

'Anna,' I asked, 'what's a vittle? ...' 'It is what I have got to eat and drink.' 'But you would get your vittles whether you thanked the Lord or not.' ... 'Sure, but it makes everything taste better to be thankful.'"

"It makes everything taste better to be thankful." How much we Australians need to learn that lesson! Like the Israelites under Moses, we are prone to much complaining and murmuring. Too often we fuss and fume about our Government, our work, our church, our home and family. If we learned to be more thankful and to appreciate the many gifts and blessings of God, and realised that we do not deserve His goodness, we would be more content and in our contentment find true happiness. To be thankful is to be content.

4. Thanksgiving Will Be Our Chief Occupation in Heaven

"Be thankful." Why? Giving thanks and praising God for His mercy will be our chief and foremost occupation in heaven during the ages of eternity. Should we not learn and practice the art of giving thanks now, here in this world?

A careful reader of the Book of Revelation cannot fail to be impressed with the many scenes in which the saints in heaven are standing round the throne of the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world. Always the saints are found engaged in giving thanks.

Again and again they give thanks to Jesus Christ, as we read in Revelation 1:5-6, *To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ⁶ and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.*

That which held their wonder and aroused their amazement on earth — God's mercy and love to us, His many gifts and blessings for body and soul — continues to be their theme of thanksgiving in heaven.

Is it never too early to begin learning the art of thanksgiving here and now. We should desire to become more and more proficient in giving thanks here in this life.

So in summary, to be thankful is our duty, to be thankful is to be Christ-like, to be thankful is to be content, and thanksgiving will be our chief occupation in heaven.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,⁷

And will man alone be dumb
Till that glorious kingdom come?
No, the Church delights to raise
Psalms and hymns and songs of praise.

Saints below, with heart and voice,
Still in songs of praise rejoice;
Learning here, by faith and love,
Songs of praise to sing above.

Borne upon their latest breath,
Songs of praise shall conquer death;
Then, amidst eternal joy,
Songs of praise their powers employ. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 1:1, Philippians 1:1, Titus 1:1

² Acts 9:6

³ Mark 8:6

⁴ Matt. 26:27

⁵ John 6:23

⁶ Richard Chenevix Trench, *Some murmur when their sky is clear*

⁷ Hymn 464