

## Harvest Thanksgiving.

Text: Psalm 50:14

1) Our Thanks

Suggested Hymns:

2) Our Vows

563, 566, 560, 284, 814

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 Psalm 50:14, *14 Offer to God thanksgiving, And pay your vows to the Most High.* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

The Lutheran Reformation instilled into peoples hearts thanksgiving and gratitude to God for all that He has done for us. This is why we celebrate Harvest Thanksgiving. Here we are thanking God for all His blessings which He has bestowed on us. The world would not last one second without God's continuing providence.

It is God who makes the plants grow. It is God who gives the rain and sunshine. Just consider His creation which we can use and enjoy. We have rivers, mountains and oceans as well as the vast array of plants and animals. Our land has many natural resources. God also provides us with many other blessings like doctors, hospitals, work, family, friends, church and everything else we need, including employment. Let us thank God with a cheerful heart.

Let us take note that with blessing goes responsibility. In the Small Catechism Luther himself tells us of our duty to God. We read at the close of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, " ... *Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.* "

The theme of our sermon is, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, *Our Thanks And Our Vows To God.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. Our Thanks

*"Offer to God thanksgiving,"* says the psalmist. It is a divine command, it is our duty to give thanks to God. It should be a pleasure and delight for us to do

so. Can we ever thank God enough? Can we ever sufficiently praise Him for what He has done and is continually doing for us?

Oh how little gratitude is rendered to the Giver of every good and perfect gift! How many homes, how many hearts, as regards praise and thanks to God, are as silent as the grave!

How many people are there in our country who thank the Lord with a sincere heart for all the benefits which He bestows upon us from year to year! Many people live a life of gluttony, or in drunkenness, and in various kinds of vice, instead of returning thanks to God.

Now this is the difference between Christians and unbelievers, that unbelievers are ungrateful, that, even though they are continually receiving God's benefits, who gives daily bread also to all the wicked, who makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust, they never think of saying thanks to God. Christians on the other hand receive everything with thanksgiving, because they know and appreciate God's kindness to them.

Now as Christians, let us avail ourselves of the opportunity presented to us today of offering thanksgiving to God. Let us recall to our minds some of the temporal and spiritual, general and special blessings which the has Lord bestowed on us in the past year.

These are some of them, for we cannot remember them all. They are numerous, countless, as the sand on the seashore.

As to general blessings, must we not thank God for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life? Was it not God who made us beings to enjoy the works of His hands? Did He not give us our body and soul, our eyes and ears, and all our members, our reason and all our senses?

Does He not daily and richly provide us with all that we need to support this body and life, defend us against all danger, and guard and protect us from all evil, and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us; for all which it is our duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him?

And these are but the lesser general blessings for which we owe thanks to God; for they are temporal blessings.

How much greater are His general spiritual blessings which we have enjoyed since the last Harvest Thanksgiving Day!

Great is the blessing of our creation and preservation, but is not the blessing of our redemption still even greater? Is not this the greatest gift of God that He has not dealt with us damnable sinners as we deserve, that He has not cast us away because of our sins, but has given us His own Son to die for us, and for His sake forgives us all our sins?

O let us say, then, from the depth of our soul: *“Almighty and most merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: we thank You for all Your goodness and tender mercies, especially for the gift of Your dear Son, and for the revelation of Your will and grace.”*

And when we come down to special blessings, O how should our hearts be filled to overflowing with thanks to God! Have we not experienced special blessings in our church, in our homes, in our land?

Have we not all the cause in the world to offer thanksgiving to God, because within the year He has not taken away from us His precious Word and His holy sacraments?

Are we growing sluggish, thoughtless, and cold towards God’s Word? Do we appreciate God’s precious Word! Ought not God to take away from us His Word, and to give it to others who will value it more than we do?

But no, my friends, God has blessed you with His blessed Word, and His Word still remains with us. His Word still upholds you, His Word still comforts you, His Word is still near to you. O thank Him for that, and let His Word be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.<sup>1</sup>

And is there anyone among us who has not obtained special blessings in his home? Has not God blessed the work of your hands so that you could procure the necessities of life? Has He not kept away diseases, protected you from danger, and blessed you in various ways?

And if you did see more evil days than good days, if you were greatly afflicted, did not God remove your affliction, or make all things turn out for your own good in the end?

Yes, thank Him for those special blessings in your home, and say with the psalmist, “*Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.*”<sup>2</sup>

And, finally, as to our land, what special blessings we enjoy! True, we had great disasters in certain places, floods, droughts, and storms. But calamities to affect the whole land were averted.

Some places had an abundant harvest, and prosperity is with us still. O let us give thanks to our God for these special blessings bestowed on our land in the past year. Let us say with a sincere heart, *You, O Lord, have blessed our land; to You we owe our prosperity; you are the merciful Giver of every good and perfect gift: praised be Your holy name.*

## 2. Our Vows.

Not only with our lips, but also with our lives we should offer to God thanksgiving. The psalmist therefore adds, “*And pay your vows to the Most High.*” This is the second part of our address — our vows on Harvest Thanksgiving Day.

It was a common thing among the Israelites to make a vow. Thus Jacob vowed a vow at Bethel that, if God would prosper him in the strange land where he was going, and bring him back to his father’s house in peace, the Lord would be his God, and he would surely give to the Lord the tenth part of his income.<sup>3</sup>

Jephthah vowed a vow to the Lord that, if he came home victorious from the battle with the children of Ammon, he would give to the Lord and offer up for a burnt offering whatever came forth from the doors of his house to meet him.<sup>4</sup>

Hannah vowed a vow that, if the Lord would give her a male child, she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life.<sup>5</sup>

Even the Apostle Paul vowed a vow to the Lord at Cenchrea, and went to Jerusalem to fulfil what he had promised.<sup>6</sup>

There is no divine command that such vows should be made. They were made voluntarily, especially in affliction, and showed the piety and devotion of

the person who would make a special promise to God. But when anyone had made a vow, he was obliged to keep it.

It was a flagrant sin to make special promises to God and not to fulfil them. Time and again we find God admonishing His people in the Old Testament that they must keep their vows. This He does also in our text, when He says, “***And pay your vows to the Most High.***”

Vows are also made among Christians. That there is no wrong in making vows we may see from the example of St. Paul. Christians may make special promises and give special gifts to God when He has delivered them from afflictions or bestowed on them some great blessing, and thereby showing their gratitude.

Such vows in the Christians’ life are something altogether different from the vows of monastic life, when monks or nuns vow to be blindly obedient to their superiors, to live in poverty, and to abstain from marriage.

These monastic vows are contrary to the Word of God, and are not made with a view of showing thankfulness, but of meriting something, and of gaining heaven — by one’s own righteousness and good deeds. Such vows are not pleasing to God and should therefore be broken.

But the lawful vow should conscientiously be kept. When you have made a special promise to God because He has delivered you from some great danger, or conferred on you some great blessing, you should not go back on your word, but pay your vows to the Most High.

Now there is one vow which we all have made, and which we are obliged to pay to the Most High, and that is our baptismal vow. We all vowed in Baptism that we would renounce the devil, and all his works, and all his ways.

We vowed to believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Did not most of us solemnly repeat this baptismal vow on the day of our public confirmation?

We promised then that we would remain faithful to God and to His Church, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature should separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.<sup>7</sup>

Let us cling to our promise, then, and pay our vows to the Most High.

Must we not admit that we are permitting the devil to encroach upon us? That the old wicked foe is always sowing strife and dissension among Christians. He fills hearts with hatred and enmity. Let us do all we can do to prevent him from succeeding. Let us strive to live in peace and harmony with all people.

When the devil encroaches upon us, how does that agree with our baptismal vow in which we promise to renounce the devil, and all his works, and all his ways?

And must we not admit that we do not appreciate the Word of God and His holy Sacraments as we should? Some do not come regularly to hear the preaching of the Word. Some are seldom seen at the Lord's Table. Some take little or no interest in those things which pertain to the kingdom of God.

How does that agree with our promise to be faithful to God and to His Church?

O let us not be trifling with the Lord, our God, or His patience and long-suffering with us may come to an end.

Let us pay our vows to the Most High on this Harvest Thanksgiving Day, and from this time forth more vigorously oppose the devil and his works.

Let us diligently come to Divine Service and to the Lord's Supper, and thus show by leading a truly Christian life that we are children of the Most High, who fully appreciate His kindness and love.

Let us also thank God for the righteousness of Christ which comes to us by the forgiveness of our sins.

Not only this, but that God also gives us the fruits of this righteousness, the fruits of the Spirit, which are mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. Remember what they are, *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*. Think of your baptism and remember that thereby you became a child of the almighty, all-wise, and gracious God and an heir with Christ of God's kingdom.

There is no better blessing than eternal life with Christ, so let us not only thank God for Harvest time, but also for the one thing needful, which is Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

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

---

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 119:105

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 107:1

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 28:20-22

<sup>4</sup> Judges 11:30-31

<sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 1:11

<sup>6</sup> Acts 18:18

<sup>7</sup> Rom. 8:38-39