

Sermon: The Reason We Give Thanks

Pastor Ed Blonski - November 24, 2022



What Are You Thankful For?

First, the easy part. For what are you thankful?

a. Family

Thanksgiving 2022 is about family, isn't it? After two years of pandemic wiping out family gatherings, we have reached the end – hopefully – and now are once again gathering together as family. These last two years have made many of us realize how much family really means to us.

So, we are thankful for family.

b. Church

I am not only thankful for family, but also thankful for our church! Which, when I think about it, is just another part of my family!

We have been able to plow through the pandemic with the technological gifts God has given us. Many of our church family members have been able to participate in worship even though they have not been able to gather in-person. And church family members have stepped up to commit their talents and time to help us keep the streams of worship, devotions and Bibles studies flowing!

So, we are thankful for Church.

c. Salvation

Yet, of all the things for which we are thankful, our salvation has to be at the top of the list.

We come into this world lost and condemned. And we would stay that way unless God – the only perfect one who could save us – actually did come and save us.

The Son of God came as promised, was born of the Virgin Mary, was named “Jesus” – because that is what He is, “Yahweh, the Lord, saves.”

He lived perfectly. Took our sins and forgave them on the cross. He gave us His righteousness and now we are saved!

For our salvation we are thankful.

How Can You Give Thanks?

We are thankful, but how do we give thanks? In the United States, today we have a ready-made built-in Day of Thanksgiving.

National Day of Thanksgiving

a. History

Giving thanks to God for His blessings in a new land was a common practice of the European explorers and settlers in North America. Our traditions of Thanksgiving mostly come to us by way of the Pilgrims in Plymouth Colony in New England. You most likely have heard the names: Samoset, Squanto, Massasoit, William Bradford, Edward Winslow, Miles Standish.



b. Implementation

In the years following 1621, a day of thanksgiving was observed by many. In the new nation of the United States, President George Washington was the first to declare a Day of National Thanksgiving to be held in November, 1789.

President Abraham Lincoln did the same in 1863, making his proclamation one week before St. Matthew Lutheran Church was officially founded! Lincoln's proclamation was a direct result of his conversion to Christianity. As he himself says, *"When I left Springfield [Illinois, to assume the Presidency], I asked the people to pray for me. I was not a Christian. When I buried my son, the severest trial of my life, I was not a Christian. But when I went to Gettysburg and saw the graves of thousands of our soldiers, I then and there consecrated myself to Christ."* Gettysburg was in the summer of 1863, with Lincoln's famous address given right before Thanksgiving on November 19, 1863.

c. Through the Years

While each state set their own Thanksgiving Days through the years, it was FDR that established the Federal Holiday on the fourth Thursday (after toying with moving it to the third Thursday to give more shopping days before Christmas in the midst of the Great Depression.)

Today, Thanksgiving is our established holiday that we gather together in worship, then with family to eat and watch football.

But Thanksgiving is more than just eating and watching. Thanksgiving Day has historic precedent, as I just demonstrated, but also biblical precedent.

Giving Thanks Biblically



Thanksgiving is tied to the harvest – which is natural as a harvest is a wonderful depiction of the blessings of God.

In the Old Testament, the people of God celebrated three harvest thanksgivings – the third of which directly correlates with our thanksgiving today.

Passover

Redemption from Slavery

The first was Passover – which was observed at the barley harvest in the Spring and marked the people of God’s redemption from slavery in Egypt. It pointed directly to our redemption from the slavery of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Pentecost

God comes down in fire and speaks to us

The second was Pentecost. This was held at the harvest of wheat and also celebrated when God came down on Mt. Sinai with fire and power and gave the Ten Commandments. Our celebration of Pentecost happens at the same time as we celebrate God the Holy Spirit coming as fire on the Church to proclaim the Word of God – Law and Gospel – to the world.

Tabernacles

The gift of a new land

The third thanksgiving festival for the Old Testament people of God was the Feast of Tabernacles. This was held when the grape harvest was brought in and also was a celebration of the giving of the promised land to the people of God.

This biblical celebration of Thanksgiving happened in the Autumn and directly coincides with the American Thanksgiving, which was established by the pilgrims to give thanks to God for the new land they had come to. A land in which they would be sustained by the blessing of God and would be able to worship God freely.

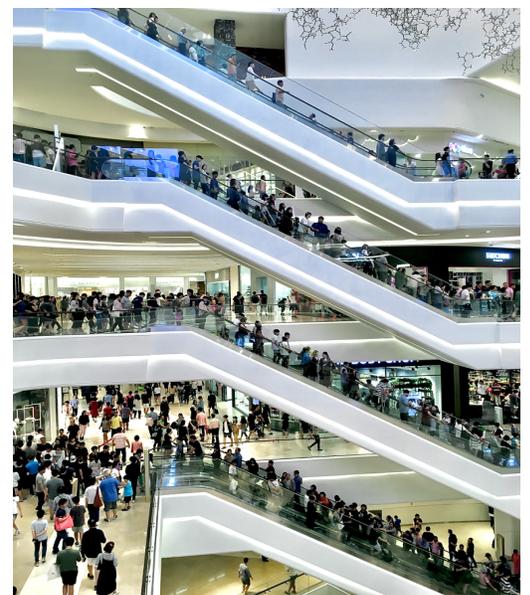
What is the Reason for Thanksgiving?

So, I’ve shown you what Thanksgiving is and how it is celebrated. Now I’ll conclude with why we give thanks, the reason for Thanksgiving.

a. Cynical – Spend Money (Black Friday)

For the cynic, Thanksgiving is about spending money. The day after Thanksgiving is known as Black Friday, the day that retail businesses can get “back into the black” on the profit ledger.

In recent years, Black Friday has been extended to the week or weeks before Thanksgiving, and days have been added to it like Cyber Monday.



The more cynical trend of this has been to have stores open first in the wee hours of Friday morning, than at midnight Thanksgiving Day, then as early as Thanksgiving Day afternoon.

Thankfully, we are past that and more and more retail businesses are stepping away from the trend of being open on Thanksgiving Day.

b. Physical – Eat ‘till You Pass Out

Then there’s the physical aspect of Thanksgiving. Another way to put it – eat until you pass out! The very nature of the Thanksgiving festival is the feast. It is a celebration of the bounty of God provided through the good land that He gives us.

That first thanksgiving in Plymouth Plantation included shellfish, lobsters, turkey, corn bread, berries, deer, and other foods.



c. Biblical – For Followers of Jesus

But for you and me as followers of Jesus, the main reason for giving thanks is from 1 Timothy 2:1-2

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.



i. Peaceful & Quiet Life

God urges us to give thanks so that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life. No doubt, we are all looking for exactly that. Peace and quiet. No wars, violence, pettiness, political in-fighting, an end to racism, bigotry, and hatred.

ii. Godly and Dignified

And when the people of God stop to give thanks – whether on Thanksgiving Day or any other day, this opens the way to living a Godly life and a dignified life. That’s the way to live, right? That’s why we give thanks!

Conclusion

We gather together to give thanks to God for this great land, for providing us with all that we need to support this body and life, and for the salvation that is our through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. Let us then give thanks so that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. In Jesus’ name. Amen.