

Deuteronomy 8:1-10
Thanksgiving
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
November 25, 2021
(preached November 24, 2022)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

On October 3, 1863, in the midst of the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a day of national thanksgiving for the final Thursday of November. It was not the first thanksgiving celebrated. Since the Protestant Reformation, authorities have called for days of public repentance and days of public thanksgiving, depending on the occasion. Of course, we remember the days of thanksgiving celebrated by the Pilgrims in Massachusetts and by other settlers in Virginia. We remember the day of national thanksgiving proclaimed by President George Washington in 1789 for the founding of the United States. But it was in 1863 that Thanksgiving really became part of the American ethos when President Abraham Lincoln declared Thanksgiving to be a national holiday.

In his proclamation of a national day of thanksgiving, President Lincoln said the following: “The year that is drawing towards its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.” Lincoln is referring to the preservation of law and order as well as the expansion of US territory and an increasing population, even in the midst of war. He continues: “No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Highest God,

who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.” And so today we fellow-citizens and friends sojourning in a foreign land thank our heavenly Father for all the good things He has given us.

On this day of national Thanksgiving we focus on our Old Testament reading, which deals with the people of Israel sojourning in a foreign land. The Israelites spent 430 years in Egypt (Ex 12:40) and then an additional 40 years wandering through the wilderness. They were on their way to occupy the land promised to Abraham, Issac, Jacob, and all his descendants. Throughout their wanderings the Lord preserved the people of Israel and provided for them. He gave them a legal system by which they could organize their lives in righteousness and purity, a legal system that reflects the created order. The book of Deuteronomy is an explanation of that Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Moses tells the Israelites why they ought to keep the Law. He says: “The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers.” The language here is the language of creation because God’s Law reflects God’s created order. When God made all the living creatures, He blessed them and said “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:22). When God made mankind, He blessed them and said “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens

and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28). After the LORD preserved Noah and a remnant of creation during the Flood, He said: “Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh . . . that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth” (Gen 8:17). The LORD said the same thing to Noah and his sons (Gen 9:1) as well as to Araham (Gen 17:6), Issac (Gen 26:4), and Jacob (Gen 35:11; 48:4). All the commandments of God are intricately woven together and reflect God’s creation. To keep the whole commandment is to honor God and His Word. The result is life, multiplication, and possession of the promised land.

Keeping the whole commandment of God is not just paying lip service to various legal ordinances, no matter how much they reflect the way creation is ordered. Keeping the whole commandment of God is a matter of the heart. It is about fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. Keeping the whole commandment of God is loving the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Deut 6:5). Moses says to the people of Israel: “you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.” God does not test for His own sake; He tests us to reveal something to us. God sends us afflictions in this life, God lets us suffer, so that we learn to trust in Him. Faith in God’s gracious provision is strengthened through trial and hardship.

The Lord allowed the Israelites to go hungry so that He could feed them with manna, the miraculous bread from Heaven. God was testing Israel in order to teach them that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Physical life comes through bread and everything that has to do with the support of the body, but spiritual life comes

from God's Word. God teaches us the same lesson over and over again. His power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). We get hungry. We become sick. We grow weary and fainthearted in this life. But the LORD is gracious to us and uses our failings to strengthen our faith and teach us valuable lessons. The Lord disciplines us because we are His children (Heb 12:7). "As a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you." God is teaching us that apart from Him we can do nothing. He is training us through physical, emotional, and spiritual hardships that our hearts might learn to depend on our heavenly Father for every good and gracious gift.

And in the midst of trials and temptations, testing of every kind, we also recognize that God has preserved us and continues to preserve us as we wend our way towards the promised land. "Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. In His divine wisdom and providence, our LORD knows exactly what we need and when we need it. He provides us with all that we need to support this body and life. The Lord blesses us with fruitful fields and healthful skies. He defends us against all danger and guards and protects us from all evil. He preserves law and order in the midst of chaos. Everything God does for us, even when He disciplines us, He does only out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy. For all this it is our duty to thank Him.

Indeed, even as the LORD has preserved us until now, so will He continue to preserve us and provide for us through all adversities in this life. "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land." Just as the LORD was bringing Israel into a good land, so is Jesus the way to our promised land in eternity. Jesus is the one who obeyed God's Law perfectly in our place so that we might have life in His name both here and in eternity. Jesus is with us in this wilderness. He was tempted like us in every respect but without sin (Heb 4:15). He fasted from physical

bread for 40 days, living only on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Jesus is our daily bread from heaven, the Word of God by which we live. He feeds and sustains us with his very body broken on the cross, and His very blood spilled for us. The LORD feeds us with his resurrected body as we make our pilgrimage from this valley of tears to our heavenly dwelling. There we have a land much like the Garden of Eden in its perfection, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing valleys and hills. As the Prophet Isaiah says “The LORD comforts Zion; He comforts her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song” (Is 51:3).

The LORD Himself, our Savior Jesus Christ, is here with us leading us through this desert of testing, afflictions, and adversities to the promised land of Heaven. On this day of national thanksgiving, let us thank our LORD for providing us with all that we need both physically and spiritually. Let us thank the LORD for humbling us through various trials that He might feed us with His Word. Let us thank the LORD for adding to our number day by day those who are being saved. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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