

## “THE GIVER OF ALL GOOD THINGS”

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Thanksgiving Service

November 23, 2016

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

For the sermon this evening we will be considering the Old Testament Lesson from *Deuteronomy*, chapter 8, verses 1 through 10. It is on page 131 of the pew Bible. In this Old Testament lesson, Moses reminds Israel what their God has given them, and he instructs them to bless the LORD. Please stand for the reading of the Scripture. From Deuteronomy 8, we begin reading at verse 1.

<sup>8:1</sup> “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. <sup>2</sup> And 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. <sup>3</sup> And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. <sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. <sup>6</sup> So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. <sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup> a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup> a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. <sup>10</sup> And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*  
You may be seated.

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Thanksgiving—a day set aside to give thanks for all the things that are important to us. Things like pumpkin pie, pecan pie, apple pie, Dutch apple pie, caramel apple pie. Can you tell my wife was baking pie last night? But of course, there is more than just pie. There is turkey and potatoes and corn and stuffing and various kinds of hot dishes and lefse. And we give thanks for all these things by stuffing ourselves into a food coma. That’s the “American way.”

But wait; there’s more. We also give thanks for football and Black Friday deals and—oh, yeah—family too.

Some of these things are more important than others. But we give thanks for all good things, because we remember, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17).

So we give thanks to the God who is the giver of all good things.

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Thanksgiving must be a difficult holiday for atheists. Not that it causes more pain or emptiness than usual, but that it must be really difficult to figure out who to give thanks to. Because two things are necessary in order to give thanks. First, you must have something good. That is, you must have something worth giving thanks *for*. And, second, you must have someone to give thanks *to*. In order to give thanks, you must have a *gift* and a *giver*.

Without a giver, the gifts are not gifts. They are either something you earned, or something that just fell into your lap by random chance.

So without someone to give thanks to, Thanksgiving becomes nothing more than a time to cultivate an “attitude of gratitude.” So maybe you find lots of different people to say, “Thank you,” to for various different things. But if that’s all it is, then so many of the bigger things end up getting left out. You might thank the various people in your life for the different things they have done for you in the last year. And this is good, but who would you thank for giving these people to you. They had to come from somewhere. And you can’t give thanks for your job or your paycheck or your house or the food in the refrigerator when you think you earned those things. And you can’t give thanks for good weather or your health or the air in your lungs if you believe those things just came about by random chance. In order to give thanks, we have to have a giver. So Thanksgiving must be a difficult holiday for atheists.

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But it’s not much easier for Christians, because, at least most of the time, we live like practical atheists. Here’s what I mean: If you ask a Christian if there is a God, we will say, “Yes.” And if you ask us who that God is, hopefully we will say, “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” We confess God with our mouths, but we usually act like there is no god.

And I don’t just mean that we deny him with our actions. Certainly, when we disobey his commandments, we deny him with our actions. But even in the basic way we live, we usually act like God does not exist.

For example, when someone asks you where you got those cool lightsaber chopsticks, you say, “Oh, I got them on [coolstuff.com](http://coolstuff.com).” And that may be true. But we usually don’t confess the ultimate reality, which is, “They’re a gift from God, just like every good thing I have.”

And everyone knows that a loaf of bread comes from the grocery store. And most people recognize there are bakers, millers, farmers, and several other people involved in the process before the grocery store. But how much thought do we give to the ultimate reality? Do we recognize the One who is really behind it all? That loaf of bread—along with the peanut butter and jelly that transform it into a delightful lunch—is a gift from God.

So we have table prayers, which are intended to remind us that even our most basic needs are met by our heavenly Father. But as soon as we say, “Amen,” we usually forget it, that is, if the table prayer was ever anything more than a formality.

And when you look at your paycheck, do you think to yourself, “I earned this”? Or do you think, “Every last penny of this is a gift from God”? When you look at your house, your car, your clothes, your Legos®, and the food in your refrigerator, do you think, “That’s mine”? Or do you think, “That’s a gift from God”?

At least most of the time, we think, “That’s mine.” And we use these things as if they truly belong to us, and as if we have the right to do whatever we want with them.

And how many things do we simply take for granted? When was the last time you thanked God for ... the air you breathe? Probably not with every breath. And when was the last time you

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thanked God for the law of gravity? It is a very good thing that we don't just float off into space. But you probably don't live in a constant state of thankfulness to the One who wrote the laws of nature.

If anyone has a thankless job—at least relative to the number of things he does for us on a constant basis—it would be God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17).

If you want to know if you should thank God for something, simply ask, “Is it good?” And if the answer is, “Yes,” then you are duty bound to give thanks to God for it. But we don't. Most things slip by unnoticed.

So Thanksgiving comes along to wake us up from our practical atheism. We are reminded that every good thing comes from God, and we ought to give thanks to him.

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So I could go on and on, lamenting how ungrateful we are and how we should do better. But let's do something else. Let's talk about the good gifts we have been given.

This is what Moses did in Deuteronomy 8. At the end of our reading, he said, “You shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you” (8:10). But before he commanded them to be thankful, he recounted for them the mighty works God had done to give them this good land.

He reminds them of the manna—the miracle bread that mysteriously appeared on the desert ground six days a week. For a short time, God let them hunger, but he did not let them starve. He let them hunger so they would know to be thankful for this gift of bread. And he did this so they would “know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (8:3). The manna was a good gift in itself, but, even more so, it pointed to something greater.

Then Moses reminded them that their clothing did not wear out. Imagine spending 40 years in the desert, wearing the same clothes, but they never wear out. That is what God did for them. And not only did their clothes not wear out, but their feet didn't either. God preserved them against all odds, so they would know that he had been good to them.

God disciplined them in the wilderness. But it was not so much a punishment for their disobedience. There was plenty of disobedience, and any punishment would have been just, but the discipline was for the purpose of teaching them—teaching them that every good gift is from God.

And now they were about to go in and take possession of a good and fruitful land with houses already built for them. And God wants them to know, that just as he had given them everything they needed in the wilderness, this good land and everything in it, will also be a gift.

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And today you and I stand in a similar place. We journey through this desert of life, but we are waiting for something better.

But even as we journey through this desert, we look around and realize there are so many good gifts God has given to us. If you want to know if something is a gift from God, simply ask, “Is it good?”

So here's your homework for Thanksgiving: make a list. It can be a mental list, or you can write it out. Make a list of everything you can think of that is good—everything from gravity to apple pie to salvation in Jesus Christ. The list can include the air you breathe, furnaces, padded

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pews, remote car starters, Legos®, the letter “A”, the number “4”, ball-point pens, your Bible, your parents, your children, your friends, your job, and anything else you can think of that is good, including the volumes of notebooks it would take to actually complete this assignment. Look around any random room, and whatever your eyes fix on, ask yourself, “Is that thing good?” And if it is, thank God for it.

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Now, as some of us look around, our minds might be filled with something other than thanksgiving. Our minds might be filled with grief. Instead of thinking purely of what we have, we might also think of what we no longer have.

When you look at an empty chair, you may not be thankful for the good gift of the chair. Instead you may have grief over the person who isn’t there to fill the chair. This may be the first holiday without that person, or it may be the fiftieth. However long it’s been, the person is still missing.

This reminds us the greatest gifts we have to be thankful for, have not yet been experienced. We are still waiting for them. And the good gifts we do have in this life are but a foretaste of the better gifts to come.

The manna in the desert taught Israel about something greater—that “man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

And the land they were going into—the land of Canaan—is also a picture of something greater. It is a picture of the new creation God has promised to all his believing children.

And in the same way, every blessing we experience in this fallen creation, is but a foretaste of the blessing of heaven, when we will be satisfied with every good thing.

So, that satisfied and content feeling you get when your belly is full on Thanksgiving—not the uncomfortable feeling you get when you eat twice as much as you should, and you wish you would have worn sweatpants—but the satisfied and content feeling when you eat the right amount to fill your belly—that’s just a little foretaste of heaven. When you’re belly says to your brain, “Relax; we’ve got enough nutrients to last a while,” that’s just a little sample of the feeling we will have in heaven, when God our Father will satisfy our bodies and souls with everything we need. There will be no more hunger, no more want, no more longing, no more death, and no more spending holidays alone.

So when you give thanks, remember, especially, God’s greatest gift—his Son Jesus Christ.

Give thanks for the fleeting treasures of this life, for they are a gift from God. And give thanks even for the fleeting pains of this life, for they remind us to look for something greater. And give thanks for the intense pain Jesus endured, for his suffering secures our eternal treasure.

God disciplines his children so that we might learn his goodness. But he does not punish his children, because he punished his only Son, and that was enough. And just as God raised him from the dead, so he will also raise us from the dead, that we might experience his perfect and eternal treasures. So we bless the Lord our God for all the good he has given us. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.