

It's Thanksgiving Eve. We've come here tonight to celebrate Thanksgiving. We've done it for years. It's a tradition. Our nation has celebrated Thanksgiving since the days of the Pilgrims. President Lincoln called for a national day of Thanksgiving over a century ago. Even though the day for Thanksgiving was moved from the last Thursday in November to the fourth Thursday of the month to possibly allow more time for Christmas shopping, we've always celebrated Thanksgiving. We know why our nation celebrates Thanksgiving, but why are you giving thanks?

We all know that our nation and our state are going through some tough times. If we get caught up in the things around us, we can lose track of all of the reasons we have to give thanks. It is hard to be thankful when you're counting your blessings on your fingers while counting your miseries on a calculator. So why do you give thanks?

I remember the one year we didn't have Thanksgiving dinner at our house. One of my aunts had invited the extended family to her house for Thanksgiving. When we got there early in the afternoon so that my mom could help with the preparation, the turkey was not in the oven. It wasn't even thawed out. Only because my mom took charge, we were able to eat Thanksgiving Dinner sometime late in the evening. Needless to say, everyone in my family was thankful that we never accepted another Thanksgiving invitation and that Mom always hosted Thanksgiving dinner after that at our house.

So why are you giving thanks? Before we can answer that question, we have to decide who we are Thankful to. Thanksgiving requires a recipient. After Jesus healed the ten men with leprosy, only one returned to give thanks to Jesus. The other nine were certainly thankful that they had been cured, but they didn't express their thanks to the Lord. The Psalmist reminds us of the one who should receive our thanks. Psalm 30:12 reads, **“O Lord, My God, I will give you thanks forever.”** As Christians, we give thanks to the Lord God.

But why should we give thanks to God? Before the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, Moses gave them these instructions. **“When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.”** (Deuteronomy 8:10) If we follow the advice of Moses we give thanks for the food that we have. My guess is that most of us will not only eat until we are satisfied tomorrow, but we will eat more than we need. We'll stuff ourselves with the turkey and the rest of the Thanksgiving Feast. We can certainly thank God that even in tough times He continues to provide us with our Daily Bread, with food for life.

We can also thank God for our nation, for this great land that we call home. Even when the economy is struggling, the United States is still a great place. The Bill of Rights guarantees us the freedom to practice our faith, the freedom of speech, and so many other freedoms that we cherish. We have a vote and a voice in our government. Our nation is blessed with an abundance of natural

resources, we produce food for the whole world to eat and we have people with a wide variety of gifts and talents. We can indeed be thankful for this good land.

But that is not all. We give thanks to God because we are His people and He cares for us. The Psalmist wrote, **“Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.”** (Psalm 79:13) Sheep need a shepherd, someone to take care of them. We need the Good Shepherd, the Lord God who loves us, watch over us, protects us, provides for us and calls us by name. Just as children need someone to watch over them, God watches over us. We are God’s children under His care.

We give thanks to God is by telling His story to others, by telling them all the things that God has done for us and the difference He continues to make in our lives. That is the reason we asked you to put a leaf on the Thanksgiving tree today as a way to tell others about God’s love and to express your thanks to Him.

We can also be thankful for the faith of others. The Apostle Paul repeatedly expressed his thanks for the faith of the early Christians. We should thank God for the faith of others, too. We can thank God for family and friends who teach us about Him. We can thank God for faithful people who help us, encourage us and inspire us. I am thankful for you, for your faith and faithfulness, for being partners in living out and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In tough times, when the cares and anxieties of the world get to us, we can be thankful that God is with us. The Apostle Paul tells us, **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”** (Philippians 4:6) We can be thankful that God is ready to hear us and help us. We can be thankful that God never turns His back on us. That gives us peace, the peace that only God in Christ can give. The Apostle Paul encourages us, **“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”** (Colossians 3:15)

The Good News is God’s love never runs out. You may run out of an item or two at your Thanksgiving Feast tomorrow. Your pile of wood for your fireplace may run low. Your patience is very likely to run out if you go shopping the day after Thanksgiving. But we will never run out of God’s love. Psalm 118:1 tells us, **“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good: His love endures forever.”** As long as God loves us, we have reason to give Him our Thanks and Praise.

One final thought. Thanksgiving is not just words. True Thanksgiving is a response to God. It is the attitude of gratitude that transforms our lives. Thanksgiving is living in thanks to God, allowing Him to sit on the throne of our lives, giving Him thanks and praise in everything. Thanksgiving is not a one day thing. It is an everyday response to the God who loves us and gives us life. Amen.