

Liturgical Day: National Day of Thanksgiving
Date: November 22, 2006 (Thanksgiving Eve)
Title: Gratitude and Trust

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

It is so good to have you with us at Saint Peter as we celebrate this National Day of Thanksgiving. I love this holiday. It is one that commercial interests haven't quite been able to run away with (although that hasn't prevented them from trying), and it is one that people of many different religious backgrounds are able to embrace. But that hasn't always been the case. In his essay "The Thanksgiving Story," Jerry Wilson reports:

George Washington proclaimed a National Day of Thanksgiving in 1789, although some were opposed to it. There was discord among the colonies, many feeling the hardships of a few Pilgrims did not warrant a national holiday. And later, President Thomas Jefferson scoffed at the idea of having a day of thanksgiving.

It was Sarah Josepha Hale, a magazine editor, whose efforts eventually led to what we recognize as Thanksgiving. Hale wrote many editorials championing her cause in her Boston Ladies' Magazine, and later, in Godey's Lady's Book. Finally, after a 40-year campaign of writing editorials and letters to governors and presidents, Hale's obsession became a reality when, in 1863, President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a national day of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving was proclaimed by every president after Lincoln. The date was changed a couple of times, most recently by Franklin Roosevelt, who set it up one week to the next-to-last Thursday to create a longer Christmas shopping season. Public uproar against this decision caused the president to move Thanksgiving back to its original date two years later. And in 1941, Thanksgiving was finally sanctioned by Congress as a legal holiday, as the fourth Thursday in November.¹

The celebration of a National Day of Thanksgiving may have gone off to a slow start, but it is certainly embraced by many in our world today – perhaps because we are aware that we have so much to be thankful for.

- You and I have experienced material blessings that our ancestors could never have imagined. Even those of us who live a fairly modest lifestyle are accustomed to comforts and luxuries that only the very wealthiest of people could afford 100 years ago.
- We live in a land where freedom and justice are central values. We haven't always honored them perfectly, but we continue to strive towards that, and it makes all the difference in the world.
- We are in a time there is a remarkable emphasis on health and well-being. Many of us will live longer and feel better than has ever been the case in history.

FIRST LESSON

JOEL 2:21-27

GOSPEL LESSON

ST. MATTHEW 6:25-33

PRAYER OF THE DAY

ALMIGHTY GOD OUR FATHER, YOUR GENEROUS GOODNESS COMES TO US NEW EVERY DAY. BY THE WORK OF YOUR SPIRIT LEAD US TO ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR GOODNESS, GIVE THANKS FOR YOUR BENEFITS, AND SERVE YOU IN WILLING OBEDIENCE; THROUGH YOUR SON, JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.

9300 E. BELLEVUE AVE.
GREENWOOD VILLAGE,
COLORADO 80111

VOICE

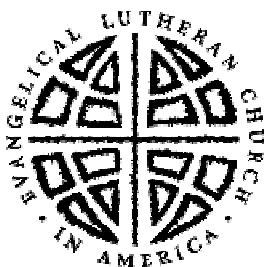
(303) 770-9300

FAX

(303) 770-9301

WEB

WWW.STPLC.ORG



Living in God's amazing grace

- And most importantly, we are people whose lives have been touched by faith in Jesus Christ, and our entire lives have been shaped by the loving and gracious relationship God is forming with us.

Wealth, freedom, health, faith... God has blessed us richly, in all of these ways. But as many in our culture give thanks for the comforts that we enjoy in this country, we as Christians know that it is not enough just to be thankful for what we have. We know it is also important to explore what it means that we have so much, and what responsibilities come with it. So each year, at about this time, we pause to consider the words of Jesus, and what they have to say to those of us who seem to have so much.

This evening the traditions of our church lead us to what has become known as "The Sermon on the Mount" – a collection of sayings that come from the preaching of Jesus. These are not easy words. Jesus was a strong preacher, and he never shied away from challenging his listeners. This text is no exception. In it, he instructs us about things like food and health and clothing. He reminds us that the birds of the air and the lilies of the field do just fine without staying up all night wondering how they are going to make ends meet.

In words that are familiar to almost everyone who attended church camp or youth group or Vacation Bible School in the 1970s, he said:

Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (St. Matthew 6:33)

Jesus teaches that if we keep our priorities straight, and keep focused on what is pleasing to God, these other life concerns will take care of themselves. If the kingdom of God is our first priority, we'll never need to worry about having enough to get by on. It is a radical claim, this notion of Jesus. Putting our relationship with God ahead of basic human needs like food and clothing is a difficult thing to do. Do we dare trust God that much? Do we dare stop worrying about what tomorrow will bring, and how we'll meet it? Do we dare live with the certainty that God will help us discover how to thrive, no matter what comes? Or does that feel just too reckless?

Several men were in the locker room of a local fitness club. A cell phone on a bench rang and a man next to it had a shampoo bottle in one hand, and brush in the other. He hit the hands free speaker feature with his smallest finger and said, "Hello." A feminine voice answered, "Honey, it's me. Are you at the club?" He said, "Yes." She asked, "I'm at the mall now and found this beautiful leather coat. It's only \$1,000. Is it OK if I buy it?" The guy thought for a second and said, "Sure, go ahead and get it." She said, "And I stopped by the Mercedes dealership and saw the new 2007 models. I saw one I really liked." He said, "How much?" His wife said, "It's only \$65,000." Everybody in the room was staring at the guy and awkwardly he said, "OK, but for that price it better have all the options." she said, "Great! Oh, one more thing. The house we wanted last year is back on the market. They're only asking \$950,000." It got real quiet in the room and the man said, "Well, go ahead and give them an offer, but just offer \$900,000." She squealed and said, "Thanks, you're the best husband in the world! I love you!" He mumbled, "Bye, I love you, too," and hung up. The other guys in the locker room were staring at him in astonishment. Finally, the man looked around and asked, "Anyone know whose phone this is?" ⁱⁱ

It's easy not to worry about another person's money. But when it comes to our own, it suddenly gets a lot harder. Thanksgiving is a time to remember how gracious God has been to us – blessing us by creating a world that is filled with rich and lovely resources. But if we truly believe what we proclaim during this season – if we truly believe that God is the source of all that blesses and sustains us – then our gratitude must lead us to trust. It is one or the other. We can believe that God is the

one who blesses us and makes it possible for us to thrive – and we can trust that God will continue to do what God has done in the past. Or we can believe that we are the ultimate source of our own security – and we can stay up at night worrying about whether we'll do well next week or next month or next year.

That's the real reason I love this holiday so much. It gives us a chance to proclaim what we believe to be true: that God loves us deeply, and will give us the strength and courage and ability to thrive, no matter what life throws at us. This is a radical belief. But it is a deeply liberating belief. Trusting that our future is in God's hands, we are freed up to be extravagant in our support of Christ's ministry and our care for those who surround us. Whatever that includes: financial support of the church, assistance given to those who are less fortunate, donations to other Christian organizations, time spent in sharing the Gospel or touching human needs – whatever that includes, we are aware that the true measure of our gratitude to God has an awful lot to do with the nature of our generosity.

Wealth, freedom, health, faith... God has blessed us richly, in all of these ways. May we be aware of the rich blessings God has showered upon us. And may our generosity be a true reflection of how grateful we are.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (November 22, 2006)

English Text: ⁱⁱⁱ

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴ "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. ^{iv}

Greek Text:

²⁵ Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν · μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῆ ψυχῆ ὑμῶν τί φάγητε [ἢ τί πῖντε], μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν τί ἐνδύσησθε. οὐχὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πλείον ἐστὶν τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος; ²⁶ ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὅτι οὐ σπείρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν οὐδὲ συνάγουσιν εἰς ἀποθήκας, καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τρέφει αὐτὰ · οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν; ²⁷ τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύναται προσθεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ πηχῦν ἓνα; ²⁸ καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε; καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς αὐξάνουσιν · οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθουσιν · ²⁹ λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων. ³⁰ εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ σήμερον ὄντα καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιέννυσιν, οὐ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι; ³¹ μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες · τί φάγωμεν; ἢ τί πῖωμεν; ἢ τί περιβαλώμεθα; ³² πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητοῦσιν · οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ

ὕμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων ἀπάντων. ³³ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν [τοῦ Θεοῦ] καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν. ³⁴μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον, ἢ γὰρ αὔριον μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς· ἀρκετὸν τῆ ἡμέρα ἢ κακία αὐτῆς.. ^v

ⁱ Jerry Wilson, "The Thanksgiving Story," Thanksgiving Traditions and History Web Site, Wilstar.com. Retrieved June 5, 2003. Reprinted with permission of Jerry Wilson.

ⁱⁱ [Dave Stone, from a sermon, "Refuse to Worry" (8/1/2004) preached at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

ⁱⁱⁱ Link to: http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/calendar_for_2001.html for a listing of Bible lessons for the coming weeks.

^{iv} St. Matthew 6:25-33, *New Revised Standard Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

^v St. Matthew 6:25-33, *The Greek New Testament*, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).