

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
November 24, 2011**

“Thanksgiving”

Psalm 118:1

There is only One Way to Give Thanks!

Hymns: 613 – 611 – 610

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

*“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.” Psalm 118:1*

Over the course of my many, many years on this earth, I’ve had the privilege of celebrating Thanksgiving in many different ways. I’ve celebrated with roommates’ families who were gracious enough to let me in on their family gatherings. I’ve celebrated in hotel rooms around a fast food meal with my brother and sister because we were on the road and no other place was open. I’ve even celebrated Thanksgiving in the middle of October, as I spent a year in Ottawa, Ontario and that is when they celebrate Thanksgiving up there. What all those different settings during those years have taught me is that when it comes to celebrating Thanksgiving, it is good to be flexible.

There are countless different ways to celebrate Thanksgiving and I’m sure all of you could attest to that. You probably all have different traditions that you follow. Perhaps you have married into even more. You probably have little things that make the day personal and special to you. You

probably all have a different “ideal” Thanksgiving in mind, a way that you would celebrate that would make it perfect and most memorable. And that is great, traditions are good. They bring us happiness. They give us things to look forward to each year. The different ways that we celebrate are great as long as we remember one thing. It is something I have learned over all those years celebrating in all those many different ways in very different places. Though there are many ways to celebrate Thanksgiving, there is only one way to give thanks! The author of Psalm 118 couldn’t say it any better when he says there simply in verse one, **“Give thanks to the Lord!”**

I don’t know that any of us struggles in knowing that it is God to whom we should give thanks on this wonderful day each year. After all, you are here in church when others around the country are scurrying to gather with their families, unwilling to use a moment of their time to come together to be in God’s house. You know it is good to be here to take time to say thank you. I’m also guessing that you will probably begin your meal tomorrow with a prayer of thanks, perhaps even using the words of the psalm on which we are focusing. Maybe you even have special ways of giving thanks on Thanksgiving; taking turns going around the table, or writing your blessings on a piece of paper and then reading them all together or some other creative thing that you do. But no matter how you show your thanks, there is certainly only one to whom we give thanks and that is to God.

So, what will you give thanks for tomorrow? Perhaps, your first thought goes to family; parents who raised you in the truths of God’s Word, spouses who have stood beside you, brothers and sisters that have offered encouragement and laughs, children who have filled your lives with a special kind of joy. Maybe you think about

friends you have made with whom you share the day, people that have come into your lives who have become like family. Certainly, there are feasts of food to give thanks for, homes that provide shelter, clothes that keep us warm and dry when it keeps raining and raining, jobs that continue to make all of it possible. The lists for each person are very different, but for each there are innumerable things that come from our loving Provider that we can give thanks for.

And while it is certainly good to give thanks to God for our physical blessings, I think that list of blessings hints to one of the problems that inflicts people on this national day of giving thanks. For many, and I would certainly have to include myself in the many, Thanksgiving is a time for giving thanks for the physical blessings that we have been given. As we gather around the table and we are pressed to name what we are thankful for, how often don't we first go through an inventory of the things that we have around us? Amazingly, even when we give thanks, we can show our selfishness. Even when we give thanks, we can show how worldly we are. Even when we give thanks, we can fall short.

But what I would like all of us to remember on Thanksgiving is this: As we give thanks to God, we have much more to be thankful for than just the physical blessings that he surrounds us with.

And the Psalmist does a tremendous job of showing the road down which our thanks should travel. He says, **"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever!"** The Psalmist doesn't say there to give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, our jobs endure forever. He doesn't say give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, our clothing and food is always there. Instead, by focusing our thanks on God's love, the Psalmist reminds us that even if all those earthly blessings were taken away, we would still have every reason to

CELEBRATE this holiday of giving thanks! If there weren't one physical blessing left for us to name, we could still be JOYFUL that we have a time of Thanksgiving!

And that is because of the LORD and his goodness and love. Giving thanks needs to start by remembering always what God has done for us, and not just thinking about all the "things" he has given to us.

And everything that God has done for us flows out of this incredible love that the Psalmist mentions here. The Hebrew word that he uses in this psalm is one of the great words in the Bible. It describes Jehovah's covenant love, the grace that God has had on all of his created people since the beginning of the world. It is the covenant love flowing from a heart filled with mercy that encompasses and embraces an undeserving people. From that love comes a covenant that God has made with a world of sinners that finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and what he has done. As we move into a new church year on Sunday, it is a covenant that we will see carried to completion.

And that completed covenant, that covenant love has allowed people from every age to give thanks to the Lord.

Some people say that Thanksgiving is an American holiday, celebrated by the pilgrims and the Native Americans who found simple blessings in the midst of hardship, but that is hardly the truth. Because of God's covenant love, thanksgiving has been celebrated since the beginning of the world. Even after wrecking a perfect world, Adam and Eve could give thanks because in his love, God made a covenant with them; a promise that he would send a Savior. Noah and his family could give thanks because though God had every right to wipe man from the face of the earth because of their wickedness, God kept his covenant alive through the ark. Chosen as the forefathers of God's people and of the

Savior himself because of God's covenant love, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could give thanks. Though he saw the many hardships of the Exodus out of Egypt, Moses saw the power of God's covenant love in the desert wilderness and he could certainly give thanks. Countless Old Testament prophets could give thanks for the great patience of God's covenant love as it endured through abandonment and idolatry for hundreds of years. The shepherds could give thanks because they saw God's covenant love come to life in the baby born in a manger. The disciples gave thanks because they saw God's covenant love go to the cross to die and come back to life on Easter Sunday. The New Testament church gave thanks because God carried that covenant love to the ends of the earth. Martin Luther gave thanks because in spite of a dark world, the light of God's covenant love could not be snuffed out. And now, with all those people going before us, we give thanks because God continues to surround us who don't deserve it with his covenant love. Nothing has changed. God maintains his covenant love and he freely gives it to us.

And if his covenant love weren't enough, God certainly showers innumerable blessings upon all of us. He gives us blessings on this earth that never end. Though each of us have different blessings, the Lord does not leave us empty-handed. He gives and he gives and he gives.

As you go out to gather with loved ones and celebrate all the things that you have been given, remember that there is really only one way to give thanks! Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his covenant love endures forever!