

GIVING THANKS BY GIVING

by Rev. Thomas Soltis, SELC Stewardship Director

Thanksgiving

Gratitude is part of the Christian psyche. The people and many things surrounding us which we manage for God as Christian stewards, remind us of His generosity. I Chron. 16:34 urges us to respond with thanksgiving: *“O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.”* How beautiful the word “forever”. God’s redeeming love in Christ’s redemption follows us from this life into eternity.

Giving Thanks by Giving

If someone happens to be following me out the door from a public place, I politely open the door. Inevitably the person will say, “Thank you.” Sometimes I respond with, “Did you say thank you?” With a serious, quizzical look, the usual response is, “Yes, I did.” “Words are cheap,” I reply; “Give me some money.” It almost always produces a smile and sometimes money.

Thanksgiving Day

Thanksgiving Day is a day of remembrance with gratitude. My family recently began the tradition of thanking God by giving. With everyone gathered around the Thanksgiving table, one chair and plate remain empty ... reserved for Jesus.

Money is placed on the plate for those less fortunate than we. The article photo shows Cassidy, my granddaughter, and great-grandson, Walter, in the process of placing money on the plate. The amount was given to Pastor Jacob Deal of Sts. Peter & Paul, Sharon, PA, to deliver to the needy in Haiti during his trip there. United Way in Cleveland, Ohio, had a terrific slogan for its 2017 fund drive: *“Be thankful today and give someone a reason to be thankful tomorrow.”* St. Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders included this encouragement: *“... we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”* (Acts 20:35)

In his appeal to the Corinthians to help meet the dire need of those in Jerusalem, St. Paul wrote: *“Your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”* (2 Cor. 9:11b)



Thanksgiving Even in Adversity

When in adversity, some find it difficult to thank God. Others in anger profusely blame Him for their difficulties. But not everyone. Christians, motivated by Gospel love, find the power to praise God even in affliction. A Cleveland Plain Dealer article (9/10/17) reported Christians in Wharton, Texas, after suffering great loss from Hurricane Harvey, giving thanks to God. Rev. Lee Kuhns, a Lutheran pastor, gathered a group of seventeen Texans in a circle. They prayed, *“Father, we come to you and thank you for all the people you sent to help us. We thank you, Lord, for the things you have given us ... the grace and mercy that we sometimes take for granted.”* Rev. Martin Rinckart (1586-1649) wrote the beautiful hymn, “Now Thank We All Our God” (LSB #895) in the crucible of affliction. The Thirty Years War raged. His city, Eilenberg, Saxony, though walled, was besieged isolating thousands within. Plague and famine took their toll. From the throes of tragedy flowed the words, *“Oh, may this bounteous God ... keep us in His grace and guide us when perplexed; and free us from all ills, in this world and the next.”* Should there be nothing of earthly nature left for which to be thankful, there is always heaven for which to be extremely grateful.

The Benefits of being Grateful

Thankfulness has the uplifting power to rescue someone wallowing in the mire of a deep blue funk. If you want to get rid of the grumbles and gain a sense of peace, then capture God’s attention by thanking Him. There is a cantankerous trait in our sinful nature to let one unpleasant incident wipe out a multitude of pleasant circumstances.

When feeling down and out, take a piece of paper and list your blessings. You’ll probably find out you have more to be happy about than sad. Rev. Henry Frost, a former missionary in China, lived through some terrible times. In the darkness of distress he found the light of peace by being thankful. He wrote: *“Nothing so pleases God as praise and nothing so blesses a praying person as the thanks he offers.”*