

“Forgive Us, Lord for Shallow Thankfulness”

“... man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord”
(Deuteronomy 8:3).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus’ disciples struggled with how often they must forgive someone who sins against them (see Matthew 18 & Luke 17). Their struggle came from their own assumptions that there must be a limit to forgiveness. However, their assumptions were undone by Jesus’ answer that showed them there is no limit to forgiveness. Jesus revealed to His disciples that there wasn’t a certain number or quota of forgiveness that could be reached and then it was enough to stop forgiving. Jesus’ point was that He provided an endless supply of forgiveness for His disciples to receive so that they might forgive without limit.

On this Thanksgiving Day, we might ask a similar question. How much thankfulness is enough? I mean, should we really save it all for Thanksgiving Day? Or should we hold some of our thankfulness back for the rest of the year? Perhaps, our life’s circumstances are less than ideal, shouldn’t we get a pass on being thankful this time around and just try again next year? Maybe, God hasn’t yet answered our prayers the way we want Him to, shouldn’t we withhold thanks until He does what we want? Could it be that at other times, if we thank God just the right amount, He’ll be more willing to give us whatever we want? How can we get the most out of God for our thankfulness?

All these questions lead toward the same point, we want our thankfulness to have limits. Whether it’s by certain times of the week, month or year or by specific situations, we can get rather stingy with our thankfulness. Other times, we want to use our thankfulness as leverage with God focused only on what He has done for us lately. For us to remain thankful, God can’t expect us to hold onto the past, we need Him to continue to earn our thankfulness in the present. It’s not hard for us to turn thankfulness into a currency with which we seek to bribe God to do our will and pleasure. If God really wants us to be thankful, then He should do what we tell Him will make us thankful ... get to it God we’re waiting!

The truth is that our thankfulness should have no end because God is always providing us with reasons for thankfulness in Him. Yet, blinded by our shallow thankfulness, we take for granted the things God continues to provide us. We minimize and overlook blessings that God never takes away all because we have our hearts set on something He hasn’t given us, something we think we ought to have to be thankful right now. And then if we get what we want from the Lord, we tune out so many more reasons He is giving us to be thankful. How often are we simply thankful with only marking religious boxes without a desire to continue to abide in Christ as He makes Himself know in this place?

Watched church online again, so convenient, check, so let’s continue to deny ourselves God’s gift of in-person community; got the baptism done, family is satisfied, check, no need to prioritize the ongoing growth and learning God regularly works through this baptismal gift; confirmation arrives, got to graduate church, confirmed and communed, check, maybe we’ll commune again on some holiday as a church alum; got to have that church wedding, married check, unconcerned with the continued investment and commitment God desires to have in that marriage; and then the cycle repeats generation after generation. You see, we’re often so thankful to use God’s gifts at church when it suits our purposes and yet our thankfulness misses the much greater depth of the gifts that God continually provides day after day and week after week.

While Thanksgiving Day might be usually seen as a great day to count our blessings and list what we’re thankful for, it is an even better time for us to admit and confess our limited and shallow thankfulness. To give us helpful words of confession, I invite you to open up the hymnals around you to Hymn 788, “Forgive Us, Lord, for Shallow Thankfulness”. Some of you might recognize these words from a few years ago when we used these same words in that Thanksgiving service to frame our confession. In this hymn there are six verses and we will speak them together in three sections, two verses at a time, as prayers of confession. I will begin each prayer with some words from our readings today and then invite you to join with me as we speak the verses of Hymn 788, “Forgive Us, Lord, for Shallow Thankfulness”. We pray:

Lord God, you spoke to your people Israel through your servant Moses, reminding them that **“man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”** (Deuteronomy 8:3) We ask that you would again remind us, your people on this day, of Your great gifts of Word and Sacrament that deliver Your love, grace and forgiveness to us. Hear us as we confess our

shortcomings of recognizing and valuing your richest gifts. (We join together in verses one and two of our hymn). *Forgive us, Lord for shallow thankfulness, / For dull content with warmth and sheltered care, / For songs of praise for food and harvest press, / While of Your richer gifts we're unaware. / Teach us to thank You, Lord, for love and grace, / For life and vision, for a purpose clear, / For Christ Your Son, and for each human face / That shows Your message ever new and near.*

Through your servant, Paul, Lord Jesus, you encourage us to lift up and give thanks for all people, including our civil leaders, because You desire that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Make Your desire, our desire, Lord, and shape our lives to live out this desire wherever you send us. Hear us as we confess our struggles to live out our faith according to Your desire. (We join together in verses three and four). *Forgive us Lord, for selfish thanks and praise, / For words that speak at variance with deeds; / Forgive our thanks for walking pleasant ways / Unmindful of a broken brother's needs; / Teach us, O Lord, true thankfulness divine, / That gives as Christ gave, never counting cost, / That knows no barrier of "yours" and "mine," / Assured that only what's withheld is lost.*

O Holy Spirit, you opened the eyes and heart of the Samaritan leper to receive in faith all that Jesus provided for both body and soul. Help us to trust and see Jesus' benefit to us and our neighbor both physically and spiritually. Hear us as we confess our distractions and renew our focus on the fullness of Jesus' mercy. (We join together in verses five and six). *Forgive us, Lord, for feast that knows not fast, / For joy in things that meanwhile starve the soul, / For walls and wars that hide Your mercies vast / And blur our vision of the Kingdom goal: / Open our eyes to see Your love's intent, / To know with minds and hearts its depth and height; / May thankfulness be days in service spent, / Reflection of Christ's life and love and light.*

"O Eternal and Merciful God, we give You eternal thanks that You have not only given us bodies and souls, but also provided us with many gifts of soul, body and possessions. You, O highest Wisdom, teach knowledge to all people. Therefore, if we experience anything that is good, this shows Your abounding grace toward us. Without Your light, our minds are darkness. Without Your grace, our wills are captive. Any mental capability and knowledge we have comes from Your mercy. Knowledge enlightens the soul. Divine grace enlightens knowledge. Whatever we know is learned either from the light of nature or from the revelation of the Word. Both come from You. You are the light of eternal wisdom. Surely whatever we know comes to us from You as a gift.

O unfailing Font of life, You are our life and our length of days. O eternal Health, You are the strength of our bodies and the vigor of our power. We do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from Your mouth. Bread alone does not keep us healthy and strong. Medicine alone does not keep us from illness. No, we are kept by every word that proceeds from Your mouth. A calm and peaceful conscience keeps the body healthy. True piety brings a calm conscience. From You, O highest Good, comes true piety, an unshakably calm and peaceful conscience, and the physical health for which we long. Any physical thing we possess beyond these basics we owe to Your kindness. Indeed, we do not merit a single crumb of bread, much less all the great earthly things that You shower on us. When people possess these earthly things, we say, 'They have had good fortune.' But they are really gifts of Your grace. Nothing is more blessed than to use these gifts in service to others and give them away. You have made us partners in this happy matter of giving gifts by granting us a greater share of earthly possessions. You sowed in us the seed of Your grace so it may grow and become a harvest of kindness toward others. You have committed to us great wealth in earthly possessions so we have the means to do good to our fellow servants. Streams of material blessings flow to us from You, the Font of all good things. Whatever we are, whatever we have, whatever we give to others, we confess that all of it comes from Your kindness. For Your boundless mercy, we give You eternal thanks. Amen."ⁱ Now, dear forgiven and redeemed in Christ Jesus, may the peace of God which Jesus has won for you, guard and keep your hearts and minds thankful in Him now and forevermore. Go in peace and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God, Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan

ⁱ Quoted from "Meditations on Divine Mercy" by Johann Gerhard. Translated by Matthew C. Harrison. Pgs. 81-82.