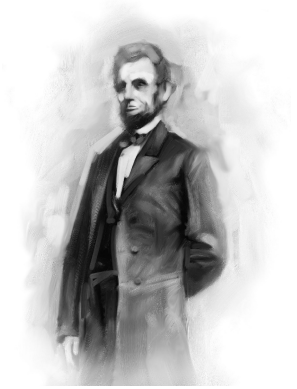


Text: Psalm 118:1

O Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, and His mercy endures forever.

Thanksgiving in Troubled Times

For many people this is a difficult Thanksgiving to celebrate. A lot of people are out of work. There are many families that have lost their homes. Many people have seen their investments and retirement funds decimated. Some families have had heartbreak or mourning. We have feared sickness in the last year. Many of us are living in troubled times. In such times both our text which speaks of God's goodness and mercy and Lincoln's Thanksgiving Day proclamation serve as reminders that it is good to give God thanks, even in these troubled times.



I. Lincoln's Thanksgiving Day Proclamation is a great example of how to give thanks in such times.

I shared Lincoln's proclamation this year because 2009 is the 200th anniversary of his birth. He was born on February 12, 1809 in a one room log cabin on Nolan Creek in Kentucky. When you look both at his life and his presidency, neither was very easy. Yet, he was the president who began our present tradition of celebrating Thanksgiving on this day. The pilgrims also celebrated Thanksgiving at this time, and Washington also had a Thanksgiving Day proclamation, but this has been a continuous holiday ever since Lincoln proclaimed that the nation should give thanks in 1863. If you are a history buff, you might notice something important about that year. The nation was right in the middle of the Civil War. Thanksgiving was held just one week after Lincoln's Gettysburg address, a battle that had 160,000 troops and 50,000 casualties in just a two day battle. There were several battles in that year which cost tens of thousands of lives in just a few days.

Despite all of the troubles that our country was going through, Lincoln found reason to give thanks. His Thanksgiving proclamation is printed in your bulletin, but I would like to share just a few parts of it. He saw how the towns, mining, industry, and the economy continued to increase when he stated,

Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege, and the battlefield, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

When he contemplated the blessings of our land, he realized that they were all gifts of God when he stated,

No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the most high God, who while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

But there is one part of his proclamation, which I especially find interesting. He says that it is to be a solemn and reverent day, and a day of repentance and a day that we remember those who suffer.

He stated,

And I recommend to them that, while offering up the ascriptions justly due to him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to his tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity, and union.

Lincoln's Thanksgiving Day was not just a day of celebration. It was also a day in which he called the nation to repent of our perversions and seek God's mercy to heal our nation.

II. That example of thanksgiving, even in troubled times occurs many times in the Bible.

I took our text from Psalm 118:1, but the exact same verse occurs at least 7 times in the Old Testament It is in psalms of thanksgiving to God. Each one of those psalms remember the deeds that God did for His people. He redeemed them from their bondage in Egypt. He saved them from their enemies. David wrote a psalm with this verse when he brought the tabernacle to Jerusalem. (1 Chr 16) Psalm 107 remembers many people who were in need. They called to God for help, and He saved them from their distress. Psalm 118 begins with this verse. It is the psalm of a man in anguish, but he commits his life to God and finds peace. It says, ⁵ *In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free.* ⁶ *The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?* Psalm 136 recalls God's great deeds for His people. The refrain that continues through the psalm is, *"His mercy endures forever."*

In difficult times, God's people would remember the goodness and mercy of God in the past. God deliverance in the past assured them, that God would not forsake them now. Those deeds proved that God's mercy endures forever. His love would never fail them.

But those same psalms not only recall God's great deeds, they also call on God's people to repent, just as Lincoln called on our nation to repent. Psalm 106, which begins with our text confesses, ⁶ *We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly.* Psalm 107 remembers those who rebelled against God. Even in the midst of their thanksgiving, the people confessed their sins and sought God's forgiveness. It's interesting how often thanksgiving and repentance go together.

III. We also have reason to be thankful, even in these trouble times.

A thankful heart is a repentant heart. Like Lincoln and like those examples in the Bible, we have to confess that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed. Lincoln confessed the perversions of that day. Think of all the perversions that we have today. They are jumping out at us. Just this past week, there was a lot of news about perversions at an awards show on television last weekend. We look back at the past year, and realize that we haven't been perfect. We all have our regrets. We even have our personal perversions. Yet, we are thankful that in our Savior Jesus Christ, God has forgiven all of our sins. We have come to God in repentance. We have humbled ourselves before Him, and He lifted us up. He have sends our sins away and clothes us with the righteousness of Christ. We thank

God especially for the goodness and mercy of His forgiveness.

We also recognize many blessings that God has given to us in the past year. For some of you this year has been so full of blessings, that you can't help but come here today to thank God. For others there have been so many troubles and hardships that the blessings are hard to find. One bit of irony is that people whose lives are overflowing with good things often complain about what they don't have; while people who have very little are thankful for what God has given to them. Hard times often make us thankful for what we have.

Think about your life, especially the last year. Where has God been good and merciful to you? There were times when He showered your life with great blessings. There were times when He delivered you from a great evil. There were times when He filled your heart with the peace of Christ, despite what you were going through. When you felt the guilt of your sins, He comforted you with His forgiveness in Christ. It is good for us to remember those times because they make us confident that if God was so good and merciful to us in the past, His goodness and mercy will be there for us in the future. "His mercy endures forever."

May the Lord give each one of us those thankful hearts, that don't concentrate on our troubles, even when things are very bad, but hearts that remember God's goodness, mercy, and grace for us in the past, that we may remain confident of His love in the future.

Amen.

Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 2009