

**The National Day of Thanksgiving**  
**November 26, 2020**  
**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

***“Giving Thanks in All Circumstances”***

Thanksgiving is here and, as we all know things look different this year with COVID-19 still raging in many parts of the country and world. Health experts are advising us to take precautions and rethink how we celebrate this holiday. *Sigh...* It's been a tough year for everyone with life changes that have had to be made. For some, this includes losing loved ones to the coronavirus. Behind turkey and all the trimmings, we may be asking ourselves, “What is there to be thankful for, especially this year?”

At the close of Paul the apostle's first letter to Christians living in the city of Thessalonica, he wrote these words: **“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”** (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). It's that phrase, “give thanks in all circumstances,” that captures our attention. Huh? What in the world is Paul talking about? How are we supposed to give thanks in all circumstances, especially the circumstances that bring disruption, difficulty, even death?

Note that Paul doesn't say “give thanks for all circumstances,” but “give thanks in all circumstances.” There is a difference between the two. It goes without saying that our hearts and minds are not moved to give thanks for circumstances that bring trouble, hardship, or suffering. But can we see, even in the midst of these difficult circumstances, blessings that have emerged like fragile seedlings poking up through the rubble and decay? The Lord promises that **“all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose”** (Romans 8:28). **God is more than able to transform trouble, hardship, and suffering into blessing. All of this does not come about naturally, but through faith. It is through the eyes of faith that we are able to see and discern blessings present, even in adversity and sorrow. This is what Paul is talking about when he says “give thanks in all circumstances.”**

Will Thanksgiving be different this year? Give thanks in all circumstances. Did the presidential election go as I hoped it would? Give thanks in all circumstances. What do the days ahead hold for us, especially with COVID-19? Give thanks in all circumstances. It is as Paul writes in another passage of Scripture: **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”** (Philippians 4:6). For the Christian, Thanksgiving is not a one-day event in late November. Rather, it is an on-going, daily offering of ourselves, our time, our possessions to the Lord – all that we are and have; giving thanks in response to his mercy and grace.

Even if all the material goods we possess (which aren't really ours in the first place – they are just on loan to us from God to manage) were taken away, our relationship with this gracious God remains intact, all through the redeeming life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Luther's Explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed reminds us of God's tremendous blessings in life:

*I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.  
This is most certainly true.*

And the end result of all these blessings in life? As Luther writes, it is to “thank and praise, serve and obey Him.” So, let us offer thanks and praise to God not only for turkey and trimmings at Thanksgiving, but for the deeper and richer blessings in life that go far beyond material goods. Let us offer thanks and praise to God in all circumstances.

Many people are saying that they can’t wait for this year to be done and over with. That will soon be the case since there is only a little over one month left in 2020. And what will next year bring? None of us knows what the future holds, and so what are the lessons to be learned from this year? What are the takeaways for life? I believe these words from Scripture ought to be front and center for all of us: **“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”** What would the world be like if each one of us, by the grace of God, would put these three things into practice each day: rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances? The world itself might not look any different, but how we look at the world and respond to it, would indeed be very different.

Long before there was Martin Luther (1483-1546), there was Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), also a German monk and theologian, who died more than a century and a half before Luther was born. Meister Eckhart once said, “If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, ‘thank you,’ that would suffice” (<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/81720-if-the-only-prayer-you-said-in-your-whole-life>). On Thanksgiving Day, as well as every day, let us give thanks in all circumstances. Amen.