

Heart help

*The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.
Psalm 28:7*

How often the psalmist David returns to this theme of internal help from the LORD. In the balance of this psalm, as he contemplates the ways of the wicked and their expected end, David rejoices that his heart has a refuge in the LORD. With all the troubles that the world can bring upon the child of God, we can with David trust in the LORD to be our strength and shield. It is interesting to note how often the psalmist refers to the LORD as a shield, yet in this verse we find a rare combination of it with strength. While the shield of faith in the omnipotent God can quench the fiery darts of the wicked, the inner strength that He provides is a bedrock beneath a weary soul upon which to rest, even when pummeled from other sides. This help of the heart that results from trusting the LORD is echoed in many of the psalmist's cries; for example, "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I; for thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy." (Psalm 61:2-3).

The help of the heart is sustaining through trouble to the point of rejoicing. It is engendered by trusting in Him through the trouble. It therefore causes the heart to rejoice, to the point of pouring out that rejoicing in songs of praise. This is not the common response to trouble from the lost of this world. But it ought to be the response of the believer who rests with David on the solid Rock of our salvation. May passages such as these remind us of our spiritual heritage in difficult times, in contrast to the world about us, and sustain our hearts to praise Him for the help of His countenance, and as a testimony to the surrounding world that also needs such help.

Golden Living

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

– Matthew 7:12 –

Most everyone is likely familiar with what has come to be known as the “Golden Rule”. Agnostic and atheistic academics would have us believe that Christ’s utterance of this standard of living is not unique. They cite the ancient Egyptians, the Greeks, Buddha, the Hindus, etc., and stake the claim that our Lord borrowed from these older religions. But nothing could be more patently absurd. While it is true that most religions in their vague and obscure search for truth stumble upon the logical standard of not doing unto others what you would not want done to you, Jesus uniquely pulls back the curtain and reveals from the very heart of God what even the Law of Moses could not fully communicate – a selfless directive to living a large-hearted and mercy-filled life that has the power to transform everyone with whom we come in contact.

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. “Therefore.” We can live this way only because we have a heavenly Father Who treats us so graciously, giving us all the good things that He does, not due to any deservedness on our part, but simply because He loves us and pities our condition. “Do”. This is the key that differentiates Christ’s Rule from all other religions, and also fulfills the Law of God. The emphasis is not upon the negative, but upon the positive. It anticipates a Spirit-born child of God with the love of God shed abroad in the heart. It goes beyond “thou shalt not kill” and encourages us to actively love mankind, even our enemies. It does not have us stop at “thou shalt not steal”, but constrains us to give liberally and sacrificially of our time, talent, and treasure from the vast stewarded resource of our Father’s storehouse. It transforms “thou shalt not covet” into a genuine spirit that rejoices with others at their advancements and achievements, even when we don’t necessarily experience the same. It makes “thou shalt not bear false witness” nigh impossible because we are so consumed with truth telling and honest living before God and men.

Yes, we can do unto others because of what God has done for us. Like as the second Person of the Triune Godhead stepped out of eternity into time, donned the mantle of human experience, and was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, even so we by the Spirit of Christ can empathize with others and turn our natural human actions and reactions into God-honoring, tangible love that has the power to melt the iciest of hearts. With God’s help, may we find the opportunity today with those that cross our paths to do unto them as we would have them do unto us. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Unsearchable

Ecclesiastes 7:24: That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?

With the powerful eye of the James Webb Space Telescope, astronomers have realized how exceeding deep and wide the universe is. Previous theoretical estimates are being abandoned in light of the mega-resolution of the Webb.

The ocean makes up about 71% of the Earth's surface. In fact, most of the waters remain unexplored, uncharted and unseen by our eyes. It might be shocking to find out, but only 5% of the ocean has been explored and charted by humans. The rest, especially its depths, are still unknown.

The distance to the center of the earth is approximately 4000 miles. To date, the deepest hole we have ever dug is about 8 miles. One wonders how much is left undiscovered that lay deep in the bowels of the earth. Precious gems, innumerable veins of gold ore, and perhaps unknown minerals of inestimable value may never be discovered because we lack the machinery to unearth them.

Like a diamond miner with pick and spade in hand, we are invited to search the exhaustless quarry of God's word. Let us stand in awe of our majestic Creator. How inscrutable are His mighty acts and unsearchable His condign judgments. So much is left shrouded in mystery. We must always remember that the secret things belong unto God. The Lord has set impassable boundaries: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further."

And yet with that said, the Lord has invited us to seek and find the treasures of wisdom that He has placed in His Word to our delight and fascination. Proverbs 2:4: If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. Isaiah 45:3: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

Blessings to all who read,

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

Plucked From the Darkness

Offense and Defense Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father

Galatians 1:4

Each of us to varying degrees has been rescued at some time in our life. Fortunately, most of our deliverances are usually minor and simple. Maybe we have been rescued when our car broke down on the side of the road, or a friend lent us money at a check-out counter when we forgot our wallet; while others may have been dramatically rescued from a fire or from drowning. What a wonderful feeling it is to be delivered from an unpleasant or even dangerous circumstance and restored to a pleasant and safe environment.

Today's text reminds us that we live in a hostile world. In the apostle Paul's day, the world was evil, and in our current times, our world continues to be evil. The curse with its corrupting principle permeates every nook and cranny of the globe. Sadly, the innocence of youth is quickly assaulted by the temptations of a corrupt culture as everywhere we look, we see manifestations of a world that is gone awry. Wars, anger, selfishness, hatred, murders, immorality, and depression, are just a few earmarks that remind us that this current life is not heaven.

This verse reminds us of God's solution for the world, which is twofold since He addresses both eternal and temporal problems. First and foremost, Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins. From an eternal perspective, nothing is more important for us than this. Jesus' willingness to give His sinless life as a complete payment for our sins secured eternal life for all who believe. Life on earth with all its pain and difficulties will pale in significance when we safely step on heaven's shore. Until that day, Jesus' death and resurrection have the power also to deliver us from our daily struggles with this evil world. The word deliver in this text has the connotation of being plucked from something. God's plan is for people to repent and believe the gospel, and thereby the Lord plucks us from the path of destruction and all the things that accompany it. Our new life in Christ is directed by the instruction of the scriptures and the indwelling Holy Spirit instead of the influences that are directed by the prince of the power of the air. As children of God, we become strangers and pilgrims in this present evil world.

Prayerfully, the world that thinks it strange we run not with them will be convicted and curious about our life in Christ. Being delivered from the power of this evil world, we are commanded to shine the light of Christ to the world. Let us shine the light of Christ so that others may be plucked from the clutches of this world. ~J. Ekis

Preparation

So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God.

II Chronicles 27:6

The account of Jotham's reign over Judah is relatively brief compared to most accounts of the other kings. Yet our text provides the key comment on the success of his brief sixteen-year reign, in that he prepared his ways before the LORD his God. His success as a builder and fortifier of Judah and as a military leader, described in the previous verses, is attributed here to his awareness of the view of the LORD upon his ways. He had evidently learned this key to successful leadership in his young life of 25 years leading up to his reign.

While there are many "ways" that must be decided and determined by a leader, their influences can vary. As a king, he could have determined to please the people of Judah over which he reigned. However, as seen earlier in this chapter, while Jotham did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, "the people did yet corruptly." So, to his credit, he did not allow the views and choices of the people to influence his ways. If we look back to the previous chapter, it is evident that the long reign of Uzziah his father may have had strong influence both positively and negatively. Uzziah's reign was mostly a good one, evidently till near its end, "when he was strong, [and] his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (II Chronicles 26:16). Jotham would have seen the success of his father's years of doing right in the sight of the LORD, as well as his being smitten with leprosy in his prideful act of attempting to assume the duties assigned only to the priests of the LORD, which initiated the co-regency of Jotham, as Uzziah was cut off from the people according to the Law. In addition, both Uzziah and Jotham benefited from the godly influence of prophets, including Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1).

Thus, Jotham's preparation prominently considered the view of the LORD upon his choices, as learned from these experiences and influences. We would do well to do the same as we prepare our ways, in our individual choices, in roles of leadership, and in our duties to elect and pray for those who would be our leaders.

Blessed

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

– Psalm 1:1 –

Our Lord is not frugal with the blessings He bestows upon mankind, irrespective of belief or obedience. Jesus said He makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and that He sends rain upon the just and the unjust alike. The wonder of a newborn babe, the brilliance of a sunrise, the serenity of a harvest moon, the embrace of family, and countless other natural phenomena attests to our Creator's continual intention to shower man with His blessings.

But there are also less general yet uniquely "special" blessings that can be secured from the Almighty. These are reciprocal in nature, finding their way only into the heart that fears Him, loves Him, and seeks to please Him. These are blessings that honor the soul that honors God. Our brief text outlines three characteristics of such godly desire. We do well to stop for a few moments and meditate upon our lives to see how aligned we are with Heaven.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly. In no previous generation has ungodly counsel been so universally distributed and so easily accessible. In our current day, we actually have to move with purpose to avoid it. The marketing masters and media merchants package godless counsel in everything and literally everywhere. It can be found in self help books and videos. It permeates advertising. It is part of the warp and woof of almost every avenue of entertainment. It is on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, et. al. There is no dearth of ungodly counsel out there. So, we do well to stop and ask – from whence do I get my counsel? The only useful counsel is from the Word of God. Do I go there and there alone to seek it? Is my delight in the Law of the Lord, and in His law do I meditate day and night?

Blessed is the man that standeth not in the way of sinners. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. With whom do I keep (and desire to keep) company? Do I purpose to frequently dwell in the assembly of the saints, or do I prefer worldly companionship and acquaintance?

Blessed is the man that sitteth not in the seat of the scornful. The soul that knows God and is seeking Him continually is joyful at its core, and that joy bubbles up in both countenance and conduct. It is difficult to be critical of God's ways and His people when filled with the Holy Ghost. How is my attitude? Does it reflect a childlike belief in the God I claim to know and love, or am I given over to fleshly cynicism and scorn?

Brothers and sisters, our God longs to shower His children with special blessings, but quite frequently we impede the flow due to the sickly condition of our faith. Let us be introspective, ensuring we seek to honor Him with all facets of our lives. It will redound with special blessings to the soul.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Abundant Entrance

II Peter 1:11: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

There is perhaps no more breathtaking view of a city than when, traveling eastbound through the Fort Pitt Tunnel and coming to the end, one beholds the entire city of Pittsburgh bursting into sight. As one enters the tunnel, the city is hidden behind Mt. Washington so that those traveling to the city from the airport for the first time are stunned at the panoramic surprise that greets them at the end. As with any tunnel, a driver can only see a small aperture at the end of the tunnel that gradually grows wider and wider as the vehicle speeds through to the other side. Tunnel vision stunts our peripheral senses until our eyes are liberated from the temporary confinement upon exiting the tube. Then the eyes are transfixed by the seemingly limitless vista, and so delight in the fascination of what lay before.

Our earthly existence could be likened to that experience. We enter into divine relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Our eyes are fixed on that day when our faith becomes sight. We can see "afar off" but our tunnel vision is quite limited and myopic. And yet, as we grow closer to the Lord and to our graduation moment the light at the end grows brighter and the opening much wider. At last, we arrive at the portal where we leave the darkened world that confined us and make entry into the glorious city of God. The spectacle of a golden city, heretofore unseen to human eyes now sprawling out before us, overwhelms the senses while exhausting human vocabulary in an effort to describe the wonders of the place God has prepared for those who love Him.

Proverbs 4:18: But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Blessings to all who read,

Pastor

Pleasing Jehovah

I will praise the name of God with a song; and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock...

Psalms 69:30,31

In the beginning, when God created the world, He placed man in a pristine paradise where he could enjoy all the provisions of God. God supplied all that Adam would ever need: food, purpose, companionship, and most importantly, the Presence of Jehovah Himself. Adam's prideful disobedience and the resultant curse brought many negative changes to God's perfect creation. Pain, sorrow, labor, strife, and death would become the norm, and idol worship and religious superstition would replace true fellowship with God. God's plan for redemption by sending His only begotten Son to pay for the sins of the world would provide a way for man to have his fellowship with God restored. Though the Savior did come and ultimately accomplished His mission, man's relationship with God is at times still affected by the curse. Superstitions play a large part in the world's religions; even the *grace and truth that came by Jesus* have not removed the influences of false beliefs of the religious unsaved all around us.

In the Old Testament, worship was based on a system of sacrifice for sin. These sacrifices were only types of the True Sacrifice that would one day come. As John the Baptist stated when he saw Jesus: *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*. Still, men would add to faith their own superstitions because they thought that the religious duties they performed could merit God's pleasure regardless of how they lived their lives. Over the years, the various customs and traditions they developed influenced their way of serving God. Pride played a large role and caused many to think that their actions influenced God's pleasure with them. This spiritual blindness caused the Pharisees to place more importance on keeping the Sabbath than helping a needy person. In Luke 13:14, the ruler of the synagogue stated, "there are six days in which men ought to work: in them come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day." Those words epitomized their confusion about pleasing God. Earning the praise of men,

which satisfied the pride of the flesh, replaced their longing to please the invisible God.

As believers, we want to be aware of any personal superstition that can creep into our relationship with the Lord. Certainly, God is pleased with our obedience from a grateful heart, and praising His name with songs of praise and thanksgiving surpasses any ritual sacrifice we perform.

Throughout this day we can incorporate with a sincere heart those things that please Him.

J. Ekis

Right heart trumps wrong day

For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation.

II Chronicles 30:2-4

In the wake of the preceding events where the new king Hezekiah had promoted the repair and re-consecration of the temple in Judah, as well as the priests and Levites, for the worship of the Lord, our text describes his subsequent plan to celebrate the passover feast there. After the northern kingdom of Israel had been devastated by the Assyrians, and Judah had suffered many losses from their attacks during the reign of wicked Ahaz, Hezekiah's clear desire to turn back to the true worship of Jehovah reached not only to his own jurisdiction of Judah, but also initially to the border region of Ephraim and Manasseh. While Judah had nationally departed from the temple worship under the recent reign of Ahaz, who had imported the idolatry of his neighbors to his land, the northern kingdom had long departed from the Lord, and was now populated only by a remnant of Israelites, as well as displaced foreigners, left there by the Assyrian army. Yet Hezekiah's zeal for the Lord reached out also to the northerners, not only in the border tribes, but eventually far into the others.

The prevailing issue also identified here is that there was not sufficient time to prepare and keep the passover feast in the prescribed first month of the Jewish religious year. As a result, they made the plan to keep the feast in the second month of the year. To a sanctimonious Israelite, this plan may have been regarded as unacceptable, but the people who had been neglecting or starved for proper worship of the only true God were pleased with the plan. Their desire for true worship understood that the timing was not its predominant aspect. Thus, though many in the north scorned the invitation, the hearts of those that did respond in north and south rejoiced. The balance of the account reveals a number of things about the ritual that were not quite up to standard, but it also demonstrates a spirit of true worship and focus on the Lord God that could overcome the shortfalls. The commentary on this is recorded: "But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people" (vv. 18-20).

The lesson is obvious. Better it is to have a heart zealous for the Lord and His worship in an alternate month than to have a dead heart in the right month. Centuries later, Jesus would instruct the Samaritan woman in the north that "the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). Let us always seek to be such.

Every Knee

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

– Philippians 2:10-11 –

If you have the Spirit of the Living God dwelling in your heart, you no doubt find yourself frequently grieved when you hear the name of the Savior blasphemed. There is no more apparent ongoing witness that Jesus is exactly Who He claimed to be – God Himself manifest in human flesh – than the fact that it is uniquely His blessed Name that the devil prompts sinful men to use in blasphemous cursing and scorn. No one curses the name of the Buddha, nor cavalierly swears by the name of Allah, nor virulently spews out anger in the name of the Dalai Lama. No – no one's name is used so flippantly as the Name of Jesus Christ.

But there is soon coming a day when this most blessed Name will receive the unequivocal glory it is due. This honor was secured on Resurrection morning, when our Christ walked out of the grave, conquering death and hell forever. Yes, this Name that has been maligned by devils and sinful men for two millennia will be extolled for eternity, never again to be trampled like a pearl before swine.

It will be every knee in heaven that will bow. Redeemed saints from every age and from every tribe and kindred and nation and tongue, filled with eternal gratitude and profound love for the God-Man Who washed them clean in His own blood, will joyfully bend in honor and worship to their matchless Savior. Angels, too, of every class – “Cherubim and Seraphim, falling down before Him” – prostrate in worship of their Creator Who took not on Him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. The four and twenty elders as well, casting their crowns before the throne of Him alone Who is worthy to receive riches, and glory, and honor, and blessing, both now and forever.

It will be every knee on earth that will bow. No sinful man or woman will be cursing this Wonderful Name any longer. Every villain or vagabond, every paper potentate, every haughty heretic, the proud, the pretentious, the profligate, and the perverse will all join in woefully admitting their own doom and finally paying rightful respect to Him Who is the Blessed and Only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

It will be every knee under the earth that will bow as well. Rebel devilish minions who owe their angelic origins to the Logos Who spoke them into existence, and who shrieked in terror when they met Him in the days of His earthly ministry, will bow their corrupted knees in unison with their Luciferian leader in a shameful, awful, and eternally decisive defeat before Him Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come.

Father, hasten the day when this Name will receive the universal honor it so rightfully deserves!

-- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Breath of Life

Ezekiel 37:9-10: Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet.

The Holy Spirit, that blessed and third Person of the divine Godhead, is symbolized in scripture by dynamic elements ie. fire, water, a river, anointing oil, sealing wax, moving upon the face of the waters, a rushing wind. In this text He is seen as the vivifying breath of God. This symbol was first revealed when God breathed into Adam and "the breath of life; and man became a living soul".

After Adam's transgression, God would again need to breathe life into man, now spiritually "dead in trespasses and sins". Just as Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy to the corpses that were long dead, we also are commissioned to preach the word of life to the spiritually dead and hope for the breath of God to quicken them.

On the occasion of Christ's post-resurrection appearance in the upper room, the Lord endued the apostles momentarily with the power of the Spirit—a power that would, fifty days later, abide upon them and provide them with the needed impetus to spread the gospel through the entire empire.

John 20:21-22: Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love the way you love,
and do what you would do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with yours,
to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
so shall I never die,
but live with you the perfect life
for all eternity.

Blessings to all who read,

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

A Reminder for the Future

1Samuel 7:12

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

We tend to be forgetful. Even when we have experienced some dynamic or extraordinary event, one which we may have said we would never forget, its freshness and impact can diminish over time. Great historical events are often marked by placing a plaque or monument to preserve the memory of the event and be a constant reminder to people of its significance.

Today's verse tells us of the time when Samuel set up a stone as a reminder of God's miraculous deliverance. When Israel's archenemy the Philistines drew near to engage the unprepared people in battle, the LORD divinely intervened with roaring thunder, discomfiting the enemy. Emboldened by this profound help from the LORD, the men of Israel pursued and smote the Philistines. By placing a stone and naming it Eben-ezer which means *stone of help*, Samuel was reminding the Israelites of the power and timing of Jehovah's help. This was to give them confidence when future threats would arise that God would be very present in trouble. The stone of Eben-ezer stood as a reminder of God's ability and availability to deliver in time of need.

As believers, our archenemy the devil will also draw near to engage us in battle in our Christian walk. There will be daily skirmishes and greater conflicts that arise, troubling our souls and impeding our progress. Some of these battles enter the emotional or spiritual domain while others attack us physically. Our distress can range from small and pesky thoughts to aggressive physical assaults which can produce tormenting fear. As the devil draws near to devour, we can lose focus which cripples us. During these moments we must remember a time when God delivered us in the past. At those times we may have said we would never forget, yet when the new trial arises Satan shoots his arrows of fear and doubt at us. If we dwell on our circumstances too long, we lose sight of past deliverances. When this occurs, we must quickly go back to those times when God intervened. Each of those past events can serve us well as our Eben-ezer. We also have the Eben-ezer of God's word. Every word of it is true and faithful and is a marker for us to remember the great works of God. The historical accounts remind us of God's delivering power, while its promises inspire assurance and hope.

Today, let us make our Eben-ezer of the Lord's promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us so we may defeat the devil's attacks today, and whatever confronts us in the future.

J. Ekis

Good thanks

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High.

Psalm 92:1

The axiom given in this verse has simple and significant ramifications. Giving thanks to the LORD is good because it is right. If it is good to give thanks unto the LORD, then we would expect this good action to yield good results. And for whose good is it? Do we make God any better when we give Him thanks? Of course not. We cannot add anything to His holiness, omnipotence, omniscience, righteousness, or any other of His many marvelous attributes. Giving thanks is a good thing for us. We are blessed by recognizing Him from whom all blessings flow.

We thank Him for who He is. Our benevolent Creator made us for Himself, that He might share His goodness with us, not for selfish benefit, for there is no selfishness in Him. The more we thank Him for His person, the more we can appreciate His mighty condescension in loving and caring for us, and being our salvation.

We thank Him for what He does. “Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered” (Psalm 40:5). We also thank Him for what He does not do. “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10).

The intrinsic goodness of giving thanks to the LORD is evident. By thanking Him in such ways, our soul is enriched, our countenance is lightened, and our influence is positive.

On the other hand, the negative results of not giving thanks to Him are also evident. While mankind moves further from the LORD God, we see the trend of ungratefulness manifested. The spirit of complaint comes easily to the natural human spirit, as we have all inherited a self-serving attitude from our first parents in the garden. We see the evidence of this in our culture, where happiness seems to be continually diminishing. Yet not many are observing the relationship between this spirit of ingratitude and the growing misery of human existence. There is a logical order to this.

Therefore, let us use not only the coming holiday, but every day, to reflect the truth of this simple statement and impact all about us. “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Colossians 3:15).

A Good Matter

My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

– Psalm 45:1 –

I have never liked buying greeting cards, particularly for special occasions such as anniversaries or Valentine's Day. The ludicrous expense aside (some of them are now \$10.00 or more!), the chief problem they present to me is that they are someone else's thoughts, and while they may articulate some of my own, they fall woefully short of truly and wholly expressing my feelings. It's so troubling an issue that I usually end up adding my own words to try to complete the sentiment upon my heart for the occasion (...and then I ask myself, why didn't I just write a note and save the money?!)

When it comes to our God, while it is necessary to consume and even glory in others' witness of Him and His working, it is critically important for each of us to find our own voice of praise. As we are all uniquely designed by Him, so His working in one's heart and life is never identical to His working in another's. The finished work of Christ at Calvary is the solitary and universal means of salvation for all of God's people, but the way we each arrived there – the circumstances that brought us to Him – and the post-conversion pathway of our sanctification, though all working together for our good, is nonetheless filled with various tones, hues, and textures of His marvelous grace, and we all experience it a bit differently. Yes, our Savior's dealings with each of us are incredibly and awesomely personal in nature. Because of this, it is important that, like the psalmist, our hearts learn to translate our gratitude into an oral witness to the good matter of the fidelity of His nature and character in our lives. We must frequently meditate upon His goodness to us, personally. By so doing, we will soon find it difficult to contain our adoration for Him who loves us and has washed us from our sin in His own blood.

In the frenetic business of today, let us find some quiet moments to stop and ruminate upon how good God has been. When we do, we will most surely find that there is a good matter stirring within the heart that must be uniquely articulated by our tongue or pen. May we gladly, readily, and publicly express our praise and exultation touching our King, Who so compassionately cares for each of us, even to the uttermost of His numberless flock. All thanks and honor and praise to Him Who is fairer than the children of men! -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Filled

Ephesians 3:19-21: And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

The passage before our consideration is a doxology extolling the virtues of our saving grace and reminding us of the limitless largess from which we may daily replenish our supply of spiritual sustenance. We are here invited to be "filled with all the fulness of God". Why should the saints of God be satisfied with the crumbs that fall from the Master's table, when He has invited us to "come and dine" and to "take our fill of love".

*To our bountiful Father above,
We will offer our tribute of praise
For the glorious gift of His love
And the blessings that hallow our days.*

There is no paucity of provisions to God's dear children. God's blessings not only abound but exceedingly abound; we are not just filled but filled with all the fulness! In contrast, how the carnally-minded are left to scrounge about hoping for some scant sense of fulfillment from the husks of their sinful choices. What poor wages the devil pays to his dutiful dupes. The prodigal was left with the miserable reminder that the "hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" Would to God all those in such a mendicant state would, as the prodigal wisely did, rush to the arms of their forgiving father and gain access to the treasures of His endless supply.

John 1:16: And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

Blessings to all who read,

Pastor

Describing the Indescribable

The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

(Nahum 1:3)

What does God look like? This question has been presented to many elementary Sunday School teachers for generations. So how do we describe our God Whom we cannot tangibly see, hear or touch? We may try to give examples of what God is like in the hope that young minds can grasp the truth of an all-knowing, all-powerful, omnipresent, and eternal God. Probably the words of 1 Timothy 1:17 *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory forever and ever* best summarizes what God is like.

The Bible uses metaphorical language for our finite minds so that we might gain some understanding of the infinite God. The collective metaphorical verses found throughout the scriptures form a composite description of The Indescribable. In today's text, the prophet Nahum warns of the coming judgment on Nineveh from the LORD. God is pictured to be great in power as the prophet describes His immensity by saying that the clouds are the dust of his feet. If that were literally true, we could better understand God's greatness. Elsewhere, in Deuteronomy, it is said that God brought Israel out of Egypt with His mighty hand and outstretched arm. Those outstretched arms also are everlastingly beneath us for support and protection. Psalm 34 tells us that the Lord's eyes are upon the righteous and that His ears are open unto their cry. As a Shepherd, He watches over our well-being and He listens to our calls for help. If we are dissatisfied and question our purpose in life, we are reminded in Isaiah that God is our Father and the Potter who has shaped this earthen vessel for His glory. Knowing that Jesus is the Light of the World we can navigate the darkness of this world while we let our light shine so that others may glorify Him. When we as branches abide in Him the True Vine our life becomes more fruitful, and when we consume Him as the Bread of Life our inner hungering and thirsting will be satiated. In these uncertain times, understanding that the Lord is our Rock and our Fortress (Psalm 18:2) we may be kept in a state of peace; and because He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, there is nothing of which He is not aware, or that is out of His control.

Today, as with every day, the One Who is invisible and indescribable, yet very personal, continues to be involved in setting the course of our life's plan. Let the Bible's description of Him increase our trust in Him in every situation. J. Ekis

Worship then work

From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

Ezra 3:6

This chapter describes the beginning of the work of rebuilding the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem by those who returned from captivity after seventy years, according to the proclamation of Cyrus the king of the Persian empire. The order of events described here is significant. Their purpose in coming to Jerusalem was to rebuild the temple. Yet, before any work on the temple foundation commenced, the leaders of this group first rebuilt the altar, so that the proper offerings could be made according to the worship of the LORD prescribed in the law. They apparently understood, not only the priority, but the necessity of worship over the work to be done. The actual beginning of the work on the temple foundation did not start until the second year since their arrival to the land (Ezra 3:8). Until that time, they had been preparing spiritually for the work by focusing on worship, in conjunction with planning and ordering materials. From that perspective, when the rebuilding work did commence, it was accompanied by singing praise and giving thanks (vv. 10-11).

This order of priority is a lesson for us to follow. The work of the LORD requires spiritual preparation and planning. Without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). So it is imperative to first cultivate the spirit of worship among the people of God, before we should ever expect to accomplish an effective work in His name. Mere labor or activity, even in the name of the LORD, without a spirit of worship and cognizance of our need for His presence in the work, is vain at best and self-righteous sin at worst. Thus, leaders as well as supporters and followers in any work for God must be in one accord in the spirit of worship. Note in this account that the leaders took the responsibility to ensure that the sacred order was established from the start. Although we have heard the line in modern church circles to “win ‘em, wet ‘em, and work ‘em,” it appears that such an attitude might be learned more from capitalist influences than from the things written for our learning. Jesus spent time with his disciples teaching and demonstrating to them who He was before setting them loose for the greater works. Both Peter and Paul were found on their knees or lower before the Lord Jesus, before they were made fit for the work to which He called them. Let us therefore follow this pattern, that we might fitly worship Him in preparation for and in the course of the work He has for us.