

SERMON FOR THANKSGIVING EVE – NOV. 24 AT 6:30 P.M.

Thanksgiving Eve. Psalm 107 Read Responsively. “Goodness in Action.”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, the giver of all good gifts, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Psalm that we read responsively this evening was a rather lengthy one. But it could have been much longer! For when you are listing the blessings of God, it is a long list.

And that is when you only include the things that we can think of. There are also things that we *forget* to give thanks for, and the things that God does in our lives we do not even *think* to give thanks for.

The things that appear to be unfortunate events, that we would rather not have in our lives. *Even these*, the Psalmist reminds us, are things for which we should give thanks.

And so the first verse of the Psalm sets the stage for the entire Psalm: **“Oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His love endures forever!”**

The word *love* in that verse is the Hebrew word *heseth*, a word that is rich in meaning, and so it is often translated in many different ways:

love, steadfast love, kindness, goodness, mercy, compassion, favor, benefits, and even beauty. And even that doesn't exhaust the meaning of *heseth*; it includes all of them!

Luther's definition of this word said it meant “goodness in action.” Now it is true that we do not always *see* or *recognize* the fact that in all God does He is “goodness in action.” ***But that does not make it any less true.***

In the Old Testament reading we heard that the forty years of wilderness wandering the children of Israel were forced to endure was to humble them, **and it was good.**

For when God humbles us, it is so that we might learn to rely on Him and Him alone. And during their wandering, they were not without God's love and care, as He provided them manna, meat, water, clothing, and protection.

We heard in that lesson that when God disciplines us, it is also good, for the discipline teaches us not to love sin and walk in ways that are hurtful to us; paths that lead away from Him, for He is leading us to a good Promised Heavenly Land.

If left to ourselves and our own devices, it is a land we would never see. But God, in His love, does what is necessary for us – as hard as it may

be! That we might receive His promises. And **it is good--all** of it, *goodness in action*.

We then heard in the Epistle that we should **“not be anxious about anything”** – which implies that there will be things that happen in our lives that will make us anxious!

But, Paul continues, **in EVERYTHING by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

So even in anxiety producing times, we should give thanks. Why? Because God’s will for us **is always good**, *goodness in action*.

And then in the Holy Gospel, when the ten lepers cry out to Jesus for help, what does He do? At first, He sends them away! An act that would appear to make it seem as if He doesn’t want to be bothered with them. But the reality is just the opposite – **it is good**, *goodness in action*.

And so the thing about God’s goodness and love is that it so often cannot be seen. God’s love may be likened to an iceberg. What we see, that *looks like* God’s goodness and love is only a fraction of all that He is doing for us.

The majority of God’s “goodness in action” cannot be seen – indeed, it may not even look like goodness! **But faith knows that it is good, God’s good; all of it.**

Or, to quote Luther’s commentary on Job – a man who knew a thing or two about God’s goodness, even in the midst of trouble – **“He did not simply look at the evil, as would-be saints do; he kept in sight the goodness and grace of the Lord.**

We are also to look at our misfortunes in no other way than that with them God gives us a light by which we may see and understand His goodness and kindness in countless other ways.

Then we conclude that such small misfortunes are barely a drop of water on a big fire or a little spark in the ocean.”

And where this is most true and certain for us is the cross. For there, to the eye, is no good thing. There is only trouble and humiliation and defeat.

But faith sees that the cross demonstrates for us, like nothing else, **God’s goodness in action.**

God’s goodness in offering up the life of His Son in our place.

God’s goodness in providing for us what we needed most of all – the forgiveness of our sins.

For the love of God is more than just providing clothes or food, housing, and presents under our trees!

The Hebrew word has it right – it is much, much more than that. It is love that knows no bounds.

It is love that does not do what is easy but what is hard.

It is love that loves enemies and sinners, and trades His life for theirs.

It is love that suffers and enters the jaws of death.

It is love the likes of which we see only pale imitations of in this world, which is why it is so hard for us to understand.

But that does not make it any less true! Indeed, that is what makes it godly.

You know, as people gather around tables all over the country to give thanks tomorrow, many will give thanks for the turkey, which gave its life so that we may eat.

And after we eat it, the tryptophan in the meat will make us drowsy and we will fall asleep.

But as we gather here tonight, around the Table of our Lord, we give thanks to the Son who gave His life so that we may here eat His body and drink His blood.

And this meal does *not* put us to sleep, just the opposite!

It raises us from the sleep of death and gives us a new life. A new life of godly love. A new life that will last forever.

A new life where we do not give thanks just with words, but with deeds. And so in the Spirit's power we begin to love as we have been loved and forgive as we've been forgiven.

In other words, we begin to demonstrate *Goodness in action*.

Because that is who He is, and that is who you are in Him. And that is truly a reason to give thanks! In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **AMEN**