



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Thanksgiving

November 24, 2016

“The Eyes of All”

(Psalm 145:15-16)

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“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:15-16).

Collect of the Day: Almighty God, Your mercies are new every morning and You graciously provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your goodness, give thanks for Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience all our days; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

When I think of this verse, I think of our dog Toby. Whenever I start making dinner he assumes that's the proper time for him to eat too. So he sits there in the laundry room and stares at his dish and then looks at me and then at his dish again. His eyes seem to be saying, "Come on now, work with me! This isn't that difficult." If I delay, he starts to grumble. Sometimes he'll even let out an impatient bark.

The eyes of all look to you, O Lord, and you give them their food at the proper time. I think of the squirrel at the Memorial Union in Madison. His hunger for food was stronger than his fear of humans. And so he wove in between the tables and chairs and people's feet, cautiously, because not everyone was glad to see him. He came to me and looked at me with the same look Toby gives. I gave him the biggest puffy piece of popcorn I could find. He sat on his haunches and nibbled furiously, rotating it in those paws of his.

The eyes of all look to you, O Lord. I think of Grandpa's Holsteins. In the late afternoon hours they would gather around the barn doors and wait and watch with those hopeful eyes. Grandpa satisfied their hunger, and they returned the favor.

"You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." I think of the homeless woman sitting on a bench in a park in Manhattan. She had a couple dozen pigeons perched on her shoulders, her knees, even her head. Their comfort with her implied a daily ritual, a daily feeding. Some New Yorkers think of pigeons as rats with wings. But I suspect that homeless woman worried more about people than pigeons. Her friends looked to her and she opened her hand and satisfied their desires.

Ultimately, all food comes from God. There is no food for man or beast or bird unless it comes from his hand. For years Dan Kaddatz has been filling the birdfeeders out in front of the church. Sometimes God uses us as the middlemen, but it's the Father who cares for and sustains each of His creatures, from the whooping crane to the whale. He gives them their food. Can you do that? Or as the Lord asked of Job, "Can you hunt the prey for the lion? Who provides for the raven its prey" he asks, "when its young ones cry to me for help?" (38:39).

Every fork full in your life and mine comes from the Lord. Every single thistle seed for the gold finches comes from the Lord. Psalm 104 says that too: "The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God" (v. 21). Psalm 147, "He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry" (vv. 8-9).

The eyes of all look to you, O Lord, and you give them their food at the proper time. We don't always trust that he will. I'm thinking now of God's ancient people out there in the desert, grumbling against Moses. "You're trying to starve us" they say. They exaggerate how bad their present hardship is, but also how good the good old days were. Their memory plays tricks on them and they yearn to be in Egypt again so they can sit all day long by pots full of meat and eat until were stuffed. They remember nothing of the bricks without straw or the work without reward, the whip without mercy or the life without hope.

God's people grumbled in the desert and we grumble still today . . . about the food in the school cafeteria, or from Meals on Wheels, as if it were a dollop of gruel served straight out of a Charles Dickens' novel. I think of God's people who complain about the slow service at the restaurant, and don't even look the waitress in the eyes, or smile, or say thank you to God's servant. I think of God's people today who, like Toby, expect their dinner at a certain time, and should it be a little late, they start to whine and

maybe even bark. I'm thinking of God's people today, whose grumbling sounds no different on His ears than it did thousands of years ago. Where's the thanksgiving? Where's the trust? "Were not all ten cleansed?" Jesus asked. "Where are the other nine?" The birds sang God's praises this morning at breakfast. Did you?

Ron Wille told me once when pigs see you coming to give them food, they will rush you from all sides and will jostle and shove and push and, if you're not careful, knock you right off your feet. Ron said, "They have no manners." Somewhere, Martin Luther said when we fail to give thanks to God before a meal we are little more than pigs at the trough. That tweaks my ears too because sometimes before filling my plate at the kitchen island, when we say our prayer, I say the words, but my heart is somewhere else. I forgot to bring out the butter. Or the salad is still in the frig. And then when we sit, having forgotten that we already prayed, I'll try to lead the family in prayer again. It's embarrassing. Maybe you've experienced that too.

From the highest heavens God hears lots of murmuring, but not nearly as much gratitude. Most of us grumbled during those months leading up the presidential election. Did we remember to thank God that we have this freedom to vote? Did we thank God that there weren't any brawls at the polling places? In fact, there was kindness and civility. I saw neighbors hugging each other. We went to the polling places without fear of intimidation. And nobody rigged it. Nobody hacked it. In this country the power is transferred without bullets or bloodshed, but by ballets. What a blessing! Thank God!

Election Day has come and gone, and it was one of the most divisive campaigns in memory. "Healing" seems to be the word of the hour. What better time to begin than Thanksgiving, which Benjamin Franklin called a day to give thanks for our "full enjoyment of Liberty, civil and religious." It's a day to focus on what unites us, not on what divides us.

Can you still be grateful when you don't have

everything you want? A few years ago we went cherry picking at an orchard near Fort Atkinson. Even though we went on the first day, the trees were thin of cherries. Earlier that spring there was a hard freeze just when the trees were in blossom, resulting in a meager harvest. As we were washing and pitting the cherries, I told the owner I hoped next year would be better for him. He said, “You know, this was a disastrous year for cherries, but I’ve never had two disastrous years in a row.” He smiled a little and continued, “But I have had two bumper crops in a row.”

At the proper time, God opens his hands and satisfies. When things go poorly we trust there is wisdom there. We trust it’s not random. We trust that he’s not neglecting us or forgetting about us. There’s a plan and a purpose.

Did you notice in the Old Testament lesson, God heard their grumbling. And rather than turning away from his people or condemning them, he sends them manna from heaven. We don’t read of them returning any thanks for the manna. Seems they forgot that part. Maybe they thought themselves entitled to it. We do know with time they would start grumbling against it. “We never see anything but this manna” they said. Still the Lord gave and gave and gave. He didn’t shut off the bounty just to spank them.

“You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.” “Why then do people starve?” some ask. “If God gives people their food at the proper time, why then is there still hunger and malnourishment?” Often it’s not so much a genuine question as it is an indictment against God.

What to say? First this: Where there are starving people, there’s usually military strife . . . refugees on the run and maybe even convoys full of food idling at the border, unable to enter because it’s far too dangerous. Is that God’s fault?

Where there are starving people there’s usually deep corruption and dysfunction within the government and profound neglect of duties. Is that God’s fault?

Where there are starving people there are other parts of the world where there is food in abundance, and where

there are people in abundance who have a remarkable ability to think, “Not my problem.” Is that God’s fault?

Also remember we live in a world that isn’t functioning as God designed it, and we are a people who don’t function as God designed us. We live in a world broken by man’s sin . . . in a world where there will floods and drought and hail, where there is blight, and clouds of pests, and where there is poor stewardship and sloth and dysfunction. All of it finds its origin not in the activity of God or the inactivity of God, but in man’s ancient and on-going disobedience.

Instead of indicting God, instead of shaking our heads at God, or maybe even our fists, we do well to count what we do have, and return thanks and praise to him for his generosity and grace. In the first chapter of Genesis God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.” (Gen. 1:29ff). And I think of Peter’s vision of something like a great sheet descending from heaven, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals. And there came a voice, this is for you to eat (Acts 10). God withheld nothing. That’s generosity, for those animals too are part of God’s good creation!

“You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.” That hand of his; it’s always full; he never runs out. As much as he gives, there is always more to give, more than we can take in. He does it with food. He did it on the cross as well. He opened his hands and satisfied our deepest needs.

We may not have the appetite for forgiveness like we do for pie. But the Bible teaches we need that forgiveness as much as we need anything. Without it, there is no salvation. Hebrews 9, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (v. 22), and without forgiveness there is no eternal life. The Good News is God has opened his hands on the cross, and satisfies us in ways unseen and unknown with his forgiveness.

He loves to satisfy his creatures with good things. And of these good things none is better, and none more essential than his forgiveness, for our bodies, our souls, and for our salvation.

“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.” Amen.

