

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, November 21, 2023
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart”

READING: Nehemiah 12:27-31, 38, 40a, 43 – At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps, and lyres. The singers also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem – from the villages of the Netophathites, from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. When the priest and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates, and the wall. I had the leaders of Judah go up on the top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate...The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people – past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall...The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God...And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.

You, like me, probably have started receiving Christmas cards or letters from businesses with which you have done business in the year now swiftly drawing to its close. If you haven't yet, you will. They send cheery greetings, wishes for your health, and hopes for a happy New Year. They may even send you a calendar or a telephone pad with their names and faces emblazoned on them. Isn't that special?

But you have to wonder just how thankful they really are for your patronage. Especially for YOUR patronage. Obviously they're thankful that they have customers. Obviously they're thankful they've turned a profit for the year. But how thankful are they to YOU personally? Do they actually know you? Do they have a personal relationship with you? Do they really care about you as an individual? Would they notice, would they care, would they be aware if you did not do business with them next year? Or do they just follow good business practices in a general way so you'll be encouraged to patronize them in the coming year?

It makes a difference, don't you think? Their Christmas greetings would mean more to you if they actually knew you as an individual and as a friend. That kind of greeting carries much more weight. It means there is a real and worthwhile relationship between you and them. Then their thanks really touches you; it has value to you.

Thanksgiving Day is this Thursday. Many, if not most, people will take a moment to think about what the past year has brought to them. They'll think about family, about their work and income. They'll review some of the memories they have of vacation trips, milestone events, and new toys they were able to acquire this year. And they will be THANKFUL – but to whom? Who will they thank? Their own strong right arm for gaining them their victories?

Will they thank blind luck or fate? Will their thanks be directed toward some nebulous idea or image of God? Will they be thankful because it's expected, because its "good business practices"? Or will their personal relationship with the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – lead them to genuine thanksgiving and rejoicing for all his goodness, grace, and mercy?

The Exiles who resettled Jerusalem after the Babylonian Exile, held a tremendous celebration at the dedication of the new wall around the city. The Babylonians had utterly destroyed Jerusalem. For 70 years the city had lain in ruins, the haunt of jackals and wild donkeys. Then King Cyrus had allowed the Jews to return if they wished. The remnant that returned found a daunting task awaiting them, and the first thing Ezra and Nehemiah set them to was the rebuilding of the wall. Without it there was no security. Even as they worked their enemies had tried to intimidate them and prevent Jerusalem's resurrection. Toward the last they had to work with a weapon in one hand to keep their enemies at bay. But they finished their task, the wall was complete, and now they knew exactly whom to thank – YHWH, the God of Israel.

Our year may not have been as difficult or as painstaking as was theirs. We might not have completed a task as monumental and all-consuming as they did. But you and I have nearly completed 2023, and each one of us has seen God's hand in our lives and his comfort in our sorrows and his promises fulfilled in Christ Jesus. We approach Thanksgiving Day differently than the pagans and unbelievers. It's not "turkey day" – just a self-satisfied feast and a reason to watch football and drink too much. It is a day when you and I, like the Jews at the dedication of Jerusalem's wall, look back, see God's goodness and blessing, and we from the heart give him our thanks and praise.

So, a Happy Thanksgiving to you and yours. Enjoy the day, especially if family will be a big part of it. But whether you have much or little, whether you have family close or far away, whether you have the day off or work beckons, give to your God a heartfelt thanks and lift up his name, for his love endures forever through the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 1) **SENIORS CHRISTMAS PARTY:** Thursday, December 14, noonish. Bring a dish to pass. Everything else will be provided. If you would like to participate in the gift exchange, bring a gift of about \$15.00 value. Ham will be the meat of the day. Sign up outside the office or call Karen so we know how many to plan for. Door prizes and goodies will also be awarded.
- 2) Our **THANKSGIVING EVE SERVICE** will take place tomorrow, Wednesday, November 22, at 7:00 PM. Join us and give him thanks for all his gifts.