

+ Psalm 65 + Praise That Fits + Thanksgiving Eve + 26 November 2008

What's fitting for Thanksgiving? It's not trying to squeeze into your pants after the big meal tomorrow. Instead what is fitting or proper for Thanksgiving? There are certain things that uniquely fit the holiday. You have the golden-brown turkey and all the fixings – the stuffing and potatoes, candied yams and Jell-o salads, pies and this and that. There are family gatherings and nice china, good silver and a fancy tablecloth. Maybe there's football in the afternoon or some other family tradition. There are certain things that are uniquely fitting for Thanksgiving.

So on Thanksgiving, it would be strange to see someone get fireworks out for the evening's festivities or get the kids dressed up for trick or treating. Now unless these are Thanksgiving traditions in your family, they probably wouldn't seem fitting for Thanksgiving. Tonight, however, we consider all the wonderful blessings God has given and ask, "What is fitting for God?"

On Thanksgiving, it's easy to remember to say, "Thank You, Lord," when your table groans under the weight of all the food or when your stomach is so full you have to loosen your belt. How quickly we forget to give thanks, though when we have to go back to work and the same day-in, day-out busyness of before.

On Thanksgiving, it's easy to stand in awe of God's wonders and recognize God's daily care in good times and bad. How quickly we forget, though, when we turn on the news and hear about the latest plunge in the stock market or which company is cutting jobs or whose home was foreclosed. How quickly we take those blessings for granted when our focus the day after Thanksgiving is to be a better shopper than my neighbor.

On Thanksgiving, it's easy to loudly sing, "**Now Thank We All Our God**", recognizing how great God's blessings really are. How soon after, though, we start offering lifeless praise and go through the motions of worship without thinking. So what is fitting for our God? Tonight King David helps us find a **PRAISE THAT FITS**. He sings in **Psalm 65**...

Fitting praise remembers God's mercy. David writes in verse 3, "**When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.**" We don't know when he wrote this psalm, but when you look at his life, you realize David was an expert on sin and forgiveness.

Maybe you remember the story. David stayed back in Jerusalem one spring, while his army went out to fight. One night as he walked on his roof, he spotted a bathing beauty named Bathsheba. His lust kicked in and David acted on that lust, even after he was told she was married to one of his own elite soldiers. Soon after, he found out she was pregnant. He tried to cover up his sin by bringing Bathsheba's husband back from war, but his attempts were foiled by the soldier's dedication and honesty. So David schemed to have Uriah intentionally placed where the enemy would kill him. When that happened, David took Bathsheba as his wife.

Nine months later, God sent the prophet Nathan to point out David's sin and lead him to repentance. David realized the immensity of his sin and it crushed him. Realizing all that had taken place by his hand – lust, adultery, lies, murder – overwhelmed him. He cried out to Nathan, "**I have sinned against the Lord.**" Nathan immediately responded, "**The Lord has taken away your sin.**" Although David did have to deal with the consequences of his sin for the rest of his life, he received freedom because God had wiped his sins away. He gave thanks for God's mercy.

Now our thanksgiving would be awfully shallow if not for God's mercy. Just think about it. We would have nothing to celebrate if not for God's mercy. St. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2, "**But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.**" Our praise remembers God's mercy and those precious blessings that that mercy has given us through Christ. Jesus took the guilt off our shoulders and placed it on his own on the cross. He took the full brunt of the punishment we deserved from God. He took our place and now that burden of sin is gone. **Fitting praise remembers God's mercy!**

Because of his mercy, God brings us into his presence, as David says in verse 4, "**Blessed are those you... bring near to live in your courts.**" We can go to our Lord in prayer, as David sings, "**O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come.**" Our Savior promises to answer that prayer and he does it with amazing deeds, as David continues, "**You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.**" As we seek praise that fits, we realize **fitting praise stands in awe of God's power.**

Maybe the Lord allowed David to envision our region when he wrote this psalm. He writes, ***“O God our Savior...who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves...”*** Maybe you’ve had the chance to travel through the Adirondacks or New England to gaze at the richness of God’s creation as the leaves change from green to yellows and reds or as water crashes down one of the many waterfalls of our region. Maybe you’ve had a chance to walk along one of the beaches along Lake Ontario or along the Atlantic Ocean to stand in awe of the awesome power of the waves.

As we enjoy these natural wonders, however, we also realize the awesome power of the One who created them. We see that power in the tremendous snow storms that flow off the Lake or come in the form of Nor’easters. We see that power in the hurricanes of the South and the thunderstorms of the West. We stand in awe of the One, who ***“stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves”*** with the simple words, ***“Be still!”***

Fitting praise stands in awe of God’s power. It is this power that formed those mighty mountains and the surging seas. It is this amazing power that calms the storms of the earth and the storms of the nations. This year especially we have seen what David meant by ***“the turmoil of nations.”*** We’ve seen an economic crisis grow to a point that it affects every one of us and our way of life. We’ve seen loved ones go off to war in faraway places like Iraq and Afghanistan, where fighting continues. We’ve seen the turmoil of one of the most heated presidential races in recent memory. We’ve seen the world around us seem to get more dangerous, while our nation seems to grow weaker, yet our Lord is the One who ***“stills the turmoil of the nations.”*** When nations grow too proud, God puts them in their place. Look at all the empires that have risen and fallen over the centuries – Egypt, Babylon, Rome. Perhaps it’s even happening here in America.

Still God keeps these nations in their place to carry out his will. He keeps them under control, so the message of the awesome deeds of Christ can spread to every tribe, nation and people on earth. As once was said about the British Empire, the sun never sets on the Gospel. David writes in verse 8, ***“Those living far away fear your wonders; where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy.”*** Christ gives us opportunities to share that message here in Syracuse and up in Watertown, across New York State, throughout the United States, and around the world. Our Savior rules this world. We don’t put our hope in the strength of mountains, seas or nations, but in the one who is our rock and fortress. **Fitting praise stands in awe of God’s power** on behalf of his people.

David reminds us of one more aspect of fitting praise. **Fitting praise recognizes God’s daily care.** In the verses after our text, David rejoices as God cares for every step of a farmer’s crops from planting to harvesting. We, too, can rejoice as God cares for every step of our lives.

The God, who formed the mountains and stilled the seas, isn’t too great to provide the relatively little things. Thank God for the little things! We have clothes to wear. Our cupboards and fridges have food to eat. We have a roof over our heads, possessions to enjoy and loving family and friends. The Lord provides employment so we have money to spend on more than just the necessities. He gives us life and bodies that can do countless actions from pushing buttons to designing complex machines. He gives us clean air to breathe and gravity to hold us down. He gives us warmth from the sun and shade to cool us. He gives us a facility in which we can worship and study his Word, and the opportunity to grow out of it. He gives us everything we possibly need for our daily lives and much more.

Above all, he gives us what we need most – salvation. He grants us forgiveness in Christ through that seemingly “little” blessing of his Word, through the simple waters of Holy Baptism connected with that Word, and through his body and blood given with bread and wine in His Supper. We rejoice as David does, ***“Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.”*** All these blessings seem so small in comparison to our great God, but he provides all that through the daily working of his gracious love. **Fitting praise certainly recognizes God’s daily care!**

So before you enjoy your Thanksgiving feast, be sure to offer praise that fits our gracious God. Don’t let Thanksgiving be the only time you offer such praise, but each day remember God’s mercy in Christ. Jesus has brought you into his presence because of that mercy. Stand in awe of God’s power as you enjoy his creation and recognize his daily care as you go through every busy day until you enjoy that eternal Thanksgiving feast in heaven. In that way, you, too, can offer fitting praise to our God. Amen.