

Give Thanks for God's Gracious Gifts—Holy Baptism – Mark 10:13-16

Today is something of a thanksgiving service, isn't it? We're gathered here in this new sanctuary for the first time. Last week we concluded our worship in our original facility. Now after another week of work on the project, we've moved to the other end of the building and so today we give thanks for God's gracious gifts.

You see, our God in his boundless love and mercy is a giving God. He graciously pours out blessings for every aspect of our lives. In his *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther marvels that ***"God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life."*** (Explanation to the 1st Article of the Apostles' Creed) By all means that's an impressive list of gracious gifts, but more importantly, God provides gifts that restore and nourish our souls. God's gracious gifts create and strengthen saving faith in our hearts. They forgive our sins, usher us into God's family, and assure us of eternal life with him in the glories of heaven. These gracious gifts are really why we gather here today and every Sunday—and really the reason our church exists. Those gifts can do all that because through these means of grace, God connects us to Jesus our Savior.

In our lesson, moms and dads brought their little ones to Jesus because they wanted their children to receive Christ's blessing. Luke tells us they brought infants too. Jesus' disciples didn't understand how precious every soul—even the smallest—is to our Savior. So Jesus taught them what they did not understand—that every soul is precious and every soul needs a Savior and every soul can have saving faith purely because of God's amazing grace. So Jesus took those children into his arms and gave them his gracious gift of life.

In the water and Word of Holy Baptism, we are brought into the waiting arms of our loving Savior—and that's just the beginning of God's blessings through this gracious gift! Paul writes in Galatians 3(:26-27), ***"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*** Did you hear it? In Holy Baptism, Jesus made you part of his family—a son, a daughter with real status in the family of the King of kings. Once you were an enemy. Now you're a child of God. Once you were rejected. Now you are beloved. Once you deserved condemnation. Now you have the eternal inheritance of heaven. God did all that for you in Christ Jesus and gave it to you through Baptism.

Peter adds to that in his first letter, ***"Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."*** (1 Peter 3:21—ESV) In Holy Baptism, you are intimately connected with Christ's resurrection and that changes how the holy God views you in his courtroom. You can stand before God with a clear conscience—not because you've been so good, but because Jesus was perfect for you. Jesus was sacrificed for you. Jesus rose for you. Earlier in his ministry, Peter had proclaimed, ***"Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...The promise is for you and your children..."*** (Acts 2:38-39) That promise of forgiveness through Holy Baptism wasn't just for the adults listening, but their children too.

That brings us back to our reading. Moms and dads wanted their little ones to receive Christ's blessing. Perhaps that's what your parents wanted when you were little. Perhaps you received it later in life. No matter your age or background or gender or race, this gracious gift gives you forgiveness and gives you life.

Hear now a reading from Mark 10.

Give Thanks for God's Gracious Gifts—Holy Scripture – Luke 10:38-42

Which is more important—faithfully serving the Lord with time, talents, and treasures to the best of your ability or being in God's Word in worship, at home, at work, at school? It seems that faithful Martha had trouble with this question. Is it better to do everything you can to give Jesus your best or to sit at his feet and listen? Please keep in mind that Martha wasn't doing anything wrong here, but she allowed her busy, faithful service to become such a distraction that she lost sight of what was most important for her soul and her eternity. Jesus makes it pretty clear to Martha. Every Christian is called to faithfully serve the Lord with their life—and such faithful service brings joy to Christ's heart, but the opportunity to hear or study or read the Word of God—to sit at Jesus' feet—is greater, is more important because that Word reveals our Savior and gives us life.

¹ This Hymn Festival Divine Service was also the first service in Cross of Christ's new sanctuary.

Jesus himself has said, **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** (John 8:31-32) In his holy Word, Jesus gives us truth—real, honest, life-giving truth. He gives us the truth about ourselves—how you and I are condemned sinners deserving of God’s wrath and eternal punishment in hell, but Jesus also gives us the truth about what he has accomplished for us—that a Savior who is both true God and fully human came to rescue us. Through the words of Holy Scripture, Jesus makes us **“wise for salvation”** revealing the Savior we did not know (2 Timothy 3:15). Then he motivates and equips us for lives of sacrificial service to him. Through the Word, Jesus gives us eternal life and therefore a most precious gift. So we pause from our busy schedules to sit and listen at Jesus’ feet.

Hear now a reading from Luke 10.

Give Thanks for God’s Gracious Gifts—Holy Communion – 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Our God in his boundless love and mercy is a giving God. He gives us physical gifts, but most importantly, he gives us spiritual gifts that give us forgiveness and life and salvation. In Holy Baptism, he washes away our sins and makes us members of his family. In Holy Scripture, he reveals our Savior, gives life to our souls, and equips us for works of service, but there’s one more gracious gift—a gift once described as the **“medicine of immortality”** (Ignatius of Antioch), a gift that is nothing less than a feast of the finest food and drink that bestows blessing after blessing, a gift that Jesus gave to us to give us himself.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, the Lord did something new. He was about to give up his life on a cross for the sins of the entire world. So Jesus gave himself in, with, and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus knew how weak and frightened and worried his disciples would be. So Jesus gave himself in, with, and under bread and wine to strengthen their faith in him. Jesus knew what death and the fear of death had done to his beloved humanity and his own beloved followers. So Jesus gave himself in, with, and under bread and wine to assure his people of their eternal salvation. He gave them a feast—even though it doesn’t appear to be so with only a bite of bread and a swallow of wine. He gave them a feast that gives forgiveness and strengthened faith and eternal life.

...And he gives that gracious gift to us to eat and to drink! Through that Holy Supper we receive his bountiful blessings—the forgiveness of all our guilt, the strengthening of our faith when it is weak, and the absolute assurance that heaven is ours through Jesus Christ. So we go to the Lord’s Table and joyfully receive the gift that we can touch and taste and see given to us by the gracious, nail-pierced hand of Jesus—the gift of himself.

We’ve been given gracious gifts from our God. Give thanks for those gifts in water and Word and meal for through them we have a Savior! Through them we have forgiveness! Through them we have Life! Amen.

Hear now a reading from 1 Corinthians 11.