Our theme for the day, as I’ve mentioned before, has to do with Thanksgiving. I’m sure this will be on everyone’s mind throughout this coming week as we make all kinds of preparation for the big day. But it seems that every year, we simply go through the motion of “doing” Thanksgiving. We went to the market, we cook, we indulge ourselves with food, perhaps we watch a little parade or a little football, and then we take a nap. But how often do we intentionally set aside some time for a moment of reflection upon the true meaning and purpose of why we are gathered for this holiday?

From a spiritual point of view, Thanksgiving has everything to do with our faith and allegiance to God….all the others are just extracurricular activities. Ever since the days of Adam and Eve, the act of giving thanks became a part of our regular worship. We acknowledge that God is the source of all things, both visible and invisible. God gives and also keeps what ultimately belongs to God.

Now as you remember the story, Adam and Eve’s sons Cain and Abel were asked to present their love offerings to God as their sign of commitment and dedication. Cain the older brother was in charge of agriculture and tending the field, it would be appropriate for him to bring the first-fruits or the best harvest crop his offering. Abel the younger brother, on the other hand, was in charge of tending the cattle and the flocks, so it would be appropriate for him to bring a first-borns, a young goat or a calf, as his offering. Both offerings would be acceptable and pleasing to God. God rejected Cain’s and not Abel’s. But why? **The difference rest upon their attitudes towards their giving.** One gave with joy and honor, while the other was simple going through the motion and was not giving the best that God deserves and requires of them. To make the long story short, Cain became jealous and murdered his brother as the first act of killing in human history.

But our focus this morning isn’t about what we bring as sign of our offering to God, but more so about our attitude of what we offer to God as our appreciation and thanksgiving. Does God really need another lamb or a calf, or even some first fruits and vegetable? Probably not! It wasn’t about the amount of the content, but rather about their motivation towards their giving. God is more concern about our faith and our allegiance, as well as our attitude towards grace being received and grace being paid forward.

Do we remember God or give to our favorite charity only during this time of the year? Do we carry out acts of charity in order to make ourselves feel not as guilty? Why do we give or why don’t we give? Do we give thanks to God in all circumstances, not just when things are going well, but when things seem a bit murky or uncertain about our future, when we seem to have forgotten about God and what God has done for us?

On this Sunday right before Thanksgiving, instead of going with our usual lectionary text assigned for this day, I chose a thanksgiving psalm from the Old Testament book of 1 Chronicles. Normally you would find most of other Thanksgiving psalms in the Book of Psalms. But our passage today was a bit unusual. It’s recorded by the prophet Ezra, during the time when David was the king over Israel. The purpose of Ezra’s writing was to document what God has done in the lives of God’s own people and to remind them of the covenant that God has established with Abraham and for the generations to come. The people must NEVER forget God especially when things are going well. Our ultimate purpose of living is to worship God and to obey and honor God in all that we do, all that we say. How we live our lives reflect our attitudes and our relationship with God.

This thanksgiving psalm written by David was a tribute to God’s faithfulness and obedience. David remembered to give God thanks even though he did not live a perfect life and at times failed miserably and disappointed God like we all do at times. But through God’s grace, David earned favor in God’s eyes from the days when he was chosen to be the next king even when he was only a shepherd boy and as the youngest among all of his brothers. David defeated the giants, conquered enemies in battles and sustained peace and prosperity for the people of Israel for generations to come. This song was a personal reflection of David’s heart in giving thanks and praise back to God. David had big dreams as well. He wanted to honor God by building the most grandiose temple but God denied his request. It wasn’t David’s temple to build. All David could do was to make plans for it and passed it onto his future generation. His son, Solomon would eventually take on this project, but not David.

So, what does that say about our allegiance and faithfulness to our God…that sometimes we do NOT always see the fruits of our labor. **Our timing may not be God’s timing and our plan is not God’s plan**, but that doesn’t mean that we should neglect to give God our thanks and praises.

In David’s psalm, we get a sense of how God was at work through the generations. As recorded in the previous chapters in I Chronicle, Ezra described the genealogy of the Israelite demonstrating God’s faithfulness…from Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Jacob, and from Jacob to David. After years of captivity under foreign rules and in exile, the Israelites once again reclaimed their self-pride as God’s chosen people and returned to their homeland. Things were looking UP and they ought to return thanks to God. But even when things were not going well, when suffering and misery was taking place, we also ought to give God our thanks and praise as well. We need to be grateful in all circumstances.

A friend of mine shared with me this week an interesting thought about Thanksgiving. He said that during the time of the Pilgrim when they celebrated their traditional Thanksgiving meal, they never had a buffet feast like we do today. It was a simple meal that the entire family gathered and say their prayer. They would never pass around the foods that are placed on the table. They would only eat what’s placed in front of them. The central focus wasn’t about what we have on the table, but the fact that we are gathered around the table.

Now there’s a lot that we can reflect upon this. **Perhaps it was simply a matter of table etiquette, but we are to be thankful for and be content with whatever we have right in front of us.** All that we really need is already given. Nothing more and nothing less. We shouldn’t crave for more than we need and what does not belong to us. Just be content and be thankful with what we’ve got, and don’t forget to share with others as well.

Unfortunately, we are living in a consumeristic culture when we are constantly craving for more than we ever need, bigger always seems to be better. If you don’t believe it, just look at what we are about to see later on the week in the upcoming Black Friday frenzies and madness.

Our passage today brings us back to the proper perspective of what this season is all about. It’s not about getting ourselves all prepped up for Thanksgiving or Christmas. It’s not about spending Thanksgiving eve lining up at the store waiting for the doors to open, while skipping the valuable time with friends and family? **It is, however, bout reminding and re-orienting ourselves for the upcoming season of hope and how we may share that hope and blessings with others.**

There are three key aspects of David’s psalm that are worth mentioning here:

1. **Remembering what God has done for us**, as God honors his covenant with us from generation to generation;

2) We have a mission to **tell and to demonstrate to others what God is doing in and around us**; Do a little “show and tell”.

3) We must **giving back (paying it forward)** through the giving of ourselves in terms of our talents, our time, and our resources. It would be selfish for us to horde up all of God’s blessings upon ourselves. We must give back and share God’s blessings with others. Some of us may have more gifts than the others and some may have less….and that’s ok. Just as we are reminded that those who are strong are called to support those who are weak, and those who have in abundance are to share with those who are in need.

There are plenty of opportunities where you can give yourself in sharing your resources of time, energy and talent with others. Volunteer your time in the midst of busy schedule, visit someone who’s in the hospital or nursing home, give someone a simple phone call, reach out to someone whom you have not spoken to in a while, show that you care and that they are not forgotten or pay them a personal visit at his/her home. These are all simple things that we can do but it means a lot to the recipients. They don’t cost anything, just a little bit of our time.

In critical times like these, we need to look out for one another more so than ever and strive to make a difference in this world by counting every God’s blessings. **God has called us to put our faith into action and not as passive listeners of God’s word.** **God is sending us to be play makers on the field instead of being armchair quarterbacks analyzing what we should’ve and could’ve done.** Through this upcoming season of Thanksgiving and Advent, we pray that the Spirit may steer our rightful relationships back on God in the relevance of those around us.

When Abraham Lincoln issued his *Proclamation of Thanksgiving in 1863*, the nation was in the midst of the Civil War. The nation was also very much divided just like today. He felt that in times of division, we must call on what we do have in common, that is our faithfulness in God.

Abraham Lincoln reminded the country that in spite of our differences and there are plenty, **all of us fall under the grace of the Almighty God and that we shall be united and be thankful for the many blessings that God has given to us.** For once, can’t we lay aside our weapons in the battlefield and embrace one another as sisters and brothers? And for all, instead of criticizing one another with enraged words over one’s varying perspectives and opinions, can’t we demonstrate signs of unity and peace, with grace, humility and love towards all? Perhaps that’s the challenge for us this season as well in this seemingly fractured society at the present time and going forward.

Next Sunday we begin a new season on the liturgical calendar – as the season of Advent begins. The church dedicates this last Sunday as **Christ the King Sunday** while acknowledging that Jesus is our ultimate King and not whoever is in power or in authority here on earth. As David reminded us through his psalm today, **God has never forsaken us even when things may seem chaotic, uncertained or even downright desperate and hopeless at times. We can either take the easy way by our apathy and cynicism, letting our faith and trust in God be compromised, OR we can amend our differences, build bridges that connect us instead of walls that divide us.**

So why should we give thanks? **Because it is the right thing to do. Because it’s a part of our calling as Christ’s ambassadors and part of our missional hope for our future.** As Scripture reminds us, **“*Rejoice always, Pray without ceasing, Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us.****[[1]](#footnote-1)* May we give our thanks and praise be to God not only on this day but in all of our days ahead. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)