



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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THANKSGIVING

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“Thank You, Lord Jesus!

(Isaiah 43:1)

Rev. David K. Groth

“Thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine’ (Isaiah 43:1).

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**

Earlier this year we had the pleasure of having two guests in our home for about a week, a Lutheran Bishop from Indonesia and another church leader from Malaysia. They were part of a group of about ten that were in town training with Bethesda to serve people with special needs back in their home countries.

One of our guys was by the name of Karthik Sibanyanam. He's from Malaysia, a country that barely tolerates the Christian faith. New laws are making life and work very difficult for Christians there. I really liked Karthik. He is the president of Bethany Home, a place that serves people with disabilities in Malaysia. He's soft spoken, humble, highly intelligent and very interesting. He loves to cook, and brought with him some exotic spices from home. To thank us for hosting, he made us a wonderful Malaysian stir fry.

Karthik grew up Hindu, and was studying to become a Hindu priest when he had a sort of "ah-ha" revelation. He felt the hundreds of Hindu deities were all demanding his service. They required sacrifices and incense and prayers to placate them and might become angry if overlooked or ignored. Karthik knew enough about the Christian faith to know that, in contrast, Jesus came "not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." With this understanding, Karthik started to attend a little Lutheran mission church, and with time expressed interest in being baptized. It did not go over well with his family . . . not at all. He was nearly disowned. Long story short, the family was brought to the Christian faith instead. The Lord used

Karthik to bring that about. Since then, following the example of Jesus, Karthik's life's work has been in service of others, especially those who in Malaysia are most easily ignored if not scorned.

In any event, one morning Gail had started the car and was giving our guests a ride to Bethesda. Karthik hopped into the back seat and Gail overheard him say very quietly under his breath, almost in a whisper, "Thank You, Lord Jesus." She asked him about it. "What was that you said?" Karthik was startled that she heard him, but said he was just so grateful for a place to sleep and a meal to eat, work to do and a way of getting to work, he was just so grateful that he voiced his gratitude. "Thank You, Lord Jesus." I overheard him say it once too, but it really wasn't meant for my ears. It was a personal prayer. It almost seemed to me that as Karthik went about his day, gratitude started building up within. Every now and then he just needed to give vent to it lest he suffer some kind of rupture. "Thank you, Lord Jesus."

In comparison, sometimes I find myself (and maybe you do too) brooding over something that's not going well. The thing snowballs; it seems you're almost looking for the next reason to be peeved. And instead of gratitude building up, there's aggravation, which also needs to be safely vented.

Sometimes we forget, don't we . . . we forget how blessed we are. We forget to be grateful for the little things in life, like a place to sleep and food to eat and a way of getting to work. Of course they're only little because we have them and assume we'll always have them. However, they would become enormous holes if suddenly we didn't have these things. Somebody wrote, "If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time." There's so much for which to be grateful. It's best we not grow blind to how God cares for us.

Gratitude is at the heart of our faith . . . not fear of the gods we might be overlooking. Gratitude is at the heart

of our faith, not obligation or sacrifice or service. Gratitude is the first and most basic human response to God's goodness. A quiet "Thank you, Lord Jesus" if not on our lips, then in our hearts. Clearly this is more than the ritual of politeness. It's a way of looking at the world, and giving thanks to the Lord for creating us, redeeming us, and calling us to be his own.

Those three verbs are in our text. "Thus says the LORD, he who *created* you . . . 'Fear not, for I have *redeemed* you; I have *called* you by name, you are mine.'" Created, redeemed, called. By the way, if we were to summarize the Apostle's Creed with three verbs, these would be the three. The Father created us. The Son redeemed us. The Holy Spirit called us to be his own. Here these three verbs are tucked away in a text dating 700 years before Christ.

We take them each in order. First, thank you, Lord for creating us.

The faith of God's ancient people wavered in many ways, but rarely did not waver on the doctrine of creation. These people knew nothing of the Big Bang or evolution or worm holes in the cosmos. Their faith didn't have to contend with any of that. They simply affirmed the joyful doctrine of creation: that we are not here by accident or chance. Instead, they knew themselves to be children of a creative, powerful and loving God. Scripture is soaked through with this joyful affirmation. Psalm 139, "For it was you who formed my inward parts, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Study something underneath the strongest microscope, or something at the other end of the strongest telescope . . . study any bit of creation in detail and one of the common emotions we feel is awe . . . at the wisdom, the beauty, the elegant simplicity, the creativity. Close on the heels of awe is usually gratitude to the Creator.

Many of you as children had to memorize these words from the catechism, "I believe that God has made me

and all creatures; that he has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses and still takes care of them . . .” You might not remember the whole thing, but I think you’ll remember how it ends. For all this it is my duty to . . . “thank and praise, serve and obey him.” Notice the very first response is gratitude and praise. The service and the obedience . . . that comes later. First there is gratitude and praise. (The lines between those two are wonderfully blurred.) Faith begins not with fear and trembling, not with guilt and dread or begrudging service. It begins with thanksgiving.

Thank you Lord for 1) creating us. Thank you Lord for 2) redeeming us. We needed that, for the Bible teaches all we have gone astray, each to his own way. All have fallen short of the glory of God. Like our ancestors we have rebelled against God, ignored his laws. But thanks be to God in his mercy he chose not to wipe us out, but instead chose to come down and redeem us by dying himself. Galatians 4 says, “When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (v. 4).

To redeem something means literally “to buy it back.” It is to set a captive free by way of paying a ransom. Prisoners of war were ransomed in this way, slaves too could be redeemed and set free for a price. Ransoms were normally paid with gold or silver, but not in our case. It wouldn’t come so cheap. 1 Peter 1, “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed . . . but with the precious blood of Christ” (v. 18). And 1 Timothy 2 says, “Christ Jesus gave himself as a ransom for *all* people.” No one was left out. What can we say but “Thank you, Lord Jesus”?

Thank you, Lord, for 1) creating, 2) redeeming and 3) calling us to be your own. We don’t automatically belong to him simply because he made us. Remember, sin ruined the relationship between God and man. However, when you were baptized, God called you to be his own and restored a right relationship with you.

It's a wonderful moment when that happens, when a newborn is brought to the font and the Lord's name is placed on the child. Long before we ever turn our attention to him, he has turned his attention and his redeeming love toward us. In effect, in baptism he says to us, "I have called you by name. You are mine." Therefore you are never without hope. Because you are baptized, you belong, body and soul, in life and death, not to yourself, not to your employer, not to your parent or spouse, not to sin or death. You belong to Him. He has called you by name. You are his. "Thank you, Lord Jesus." Thank you Lord for creating, redeeming and calling us.

Again, giving thanks is more than a ritual of politeness. It's a way of life. It's there at the very beginning of our faith and is also central to our faith. Thank you, Lord Jesus." Amen.

