

Now Thank We All Our God  
or  
Thanksgiving On A Dark Day

2 Corinthians 9:8

1226

Trinity Albany 11/20/60  
Sermon Of The Month

# NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD

"God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:8

This ninth chapter of second Corinthians is a rather amazing chapter. Actually, Paul is writing about a collection. If you start back in the eighth chapter you will read: "We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part." Then he tells how these churches begged for the favor of taking part in a collection for the relief of needy Christians in Jerusalem. This business of offerings is not just a Methodist custom! Here in the early church the leaders were concerned that one group would help another. Here in the early church there were those who opposed such offerings and others who responded gladly. Paul talks about the generous gift which the Macedonian Christians had given and indicates that he is sending Titus to collect a gift from the church at Corinth.

Then he writes the tremendous passage which we read for our Scripture this morning (2 Corinthians 9:6-15). Here are the familiar passages: "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." "God loves a cheerful giver." The Greek word here is "hilaros" from which we get our word *hilarious*. It always seems to me that the suggestion is more than just a giver who smiles. He is a giver who gives with abandon and enthusiasm. Then we read, "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that you may have enough to provide for others." Paul believed that the generous person will be provided with the means to be generous! He writes: "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness."

"NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD"

OR  
"THANKSGIVING ON A DARK DAY"

A Sermon Preached by

Rev. Harold M. Griffin

Preached on  
November 20, 1960

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The Corinthian Christians will themselves be enriched by their generosity and will then become the producers of thanksgiving. Many other people will be thankful for them and will pray for them because of their generosity. We could talk for a long time about the blessings of generosity. At Thanksgiving time we generally think about things which have been given to us, but here Paul is saying that we ought to be thankful for the opportunity we have to give to others. God provides us with an abundance so that we may share this abundance. This may be an new idea to you, that one of the real reasons for thanksgiving can be that we have the means to help other people. The Corinthian church was a wealthy group and the Apostle was trying to make them see that this placed responsibility upon them. But you notice that the Macedonian church was a poor church and yet he indicated that they too had the opportunity to share in proportion to their means. Any person can be thankful that he is potentially able to help another person. This is the heart of Christianity. Jesus said that he came to *serve*, not to be served.

Now I can imagine that some of you are thinking that this is an example of the impractical nonsense we expect to find in the Bible. But have you read the President's proclamation for our Thanksgiving Day? This is usually buried inside our papers and we seldom read it. I had to look hard in order to find it. I should like to quote from the words of Mr. Eisenhower's proclamation: ~~WHEREAS~~ *WHEREAS* ~~the people of the United States have been blessed with an abundant harvest; and whereas it is fitting and appropriate at this time of national thanksgiving that we should remember and respond to the needs of those of other lands...~~ *WHEREAS* again this year we have been blessed with an abundant harvest; and whereas it is fitting and appropriate at this time of national thanksgiving that we should remember and respond to the needs of those of other lands... I call upon our people, while giving thanks for our blessings, to direct their thoughts to the peoples of other lands less fortunate than we." Then he urges his fellow Americans to support and assist the efforts which voluntary citizens groups and religious societies are making toward the solution of the world food problem. His proclamation sounds almost like the letter which Paul wrote to his Corinthian brethren.

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I realize that a very complex problem confronts us here. The whole question of over-population is involved. Personally, I think that the Christian Church should be very concerned about this. In any discussion of the stewardship and responsibility of Christian people the population question is one that cannot be avoided. The last General Conference of the Methodist Church went on record as follows: "Parenthood is a Christian privilege and responsibility; and the highest ideals of the Christian family can be achieved when children are wanted, anticipated, and welcomed into the home." Responsible parenthood is a Christian doctrine. The rapid increase in population—the so-called "population explosion," however, makes this more than an individual matter. *There* rapid increase in our world population presents dangers that may not be so dramatic but are just as real as "the bomb."

Having said this, I still maintain that we have also a responsibility to the hungry people of our world. These are the people who are the most susceptible to the promises of Communism. Just on a basis of self-interest we should be concerned. As Christians, however, we should have a higher motive than self-interest. The grateful heart expresses itself in such a way that other people are given reasons to be grateful.

It goes further than this. God supplies additional resources—in the words of the Bible, "Provides in abundance for every good work." I know and have known some very poor people. I know people who are happy and I know people who are miserable. But the correlation is not between riches or poverty and happiness. Happiness is related to generosity and generosity is related to thankfulness. A long time ago I was riding in car with some friends. It was in the late afternoon and the sun was setting. In the back seat was a wonderful man. He was elderly, had snow white hair and was very happy to be out with his family. Suddenly his daughter-in-law said, "Father, I see the sun in your face!" We looked and sure enough the setting sun was shining on his face in such a way that he was literally aglow. It was more than an external glow. There was something in-

side was showing on his face. It happened he was rather wealthy. I knew also that he had gone through much sadness in his life. In spite of everything he had learned that God had provide him in abundance so that he might always have enough to provide in abundance for every good work. Yes, we could see the sun in his face. Our lives become full in proportion as we open our lives to the needs of others. The President is right. American is great only when America is generous.

This generosity comes, really, from our deep sense of gratitude to God. Paul says it in the last verse of the chapter, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" The person who knows Christ has a reason for thanks. This reason is deeper than the mere counting of material blessings. It means that we can give thanks even on a dark day. There is a hymn in the Methodist Hymnal (7) that shows us how to give thanks on a dark day. This hymn came out of the darkness of the Thirty Years War in Europe. The background is death and slaughter, plague and famine. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Revelation 6) were riding over the land when this hymn was written. It was not written with a beautiful country church decorated with flowers and fruit in mind. It was not written to be sung in a great Cathedral. It was written to be sung in a home, as a grace—thanksgiving on a dark day.

"Now thank we all our God  
With heart and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things hath done,  
In whom His world rejoices;  
Who, from our mothers' arms,  
Hath blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love,  
And still is ours today.

"O may this bounteous God,  
Through all our life be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts  
And blessed peace to cheer us;  
And keep us in His grace,  
And guide us when perplexed,  
And free us from all ills  
In this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God  
The Father now be given,  
The Son, and Him who reigns  
With them in highest heaven,  
The one eternal God,  
Whom earth and heaven adore;  
For thus it was, is now,  
And shall be evermore." (Martin Rinkart)

What can we do on Thanksgiving Day in 1960? First, we can learn how to accept our lives with thankfulness. William Law wrote in "A Serious Call To A Devout Life," "If anyone would tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness and all perfection, he must tell you to make a rule to yourself to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you." He also said, "The true saint is he who is always thankful to God, who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness." Start today to use everything that happens to you as a means of glorifying God. This is not always easy. Our Associate Minister called me this morning to report that all three of his children have the measles and he and his wife have a virus. I can imagine that he is having a bit of struggle right now how to accept this with thankfulness! We do not mean a Polly-Anna attitude that things could be worse. We do not mean to disregard, or try to disregard ill fortune or distress. We mean to recognize it for what it is and then ask ourselves the question, "How can I serve God better through my misfortune?" The prophets of the Old Testament caught this insight as they interpreted national disaster as the voice of God. You will find real reason for thanks if you can learn to use whatever happens to you for the glory of God.

In the second place learn to be aware of the great blessings of your life and not take them for granted. On Saturday I sat in the waiting room of the O'Hare airport in Chicago. My plane was nearly an hour late, I had had no lunch and I was feeling very sorry for myself. Some people passed me. I noticed that the woman was blind. I could see. I have always been able to see. Do you know that I can never remember thanking God for my sight? Another group of people passed me. They were pushing a wheel chair. In the chair was man about my own age. He

was paralyzed. I could walk. I did not have to wait for someone when I wanted to go across the waiting-room. Do you know that I can never remember thanking God ~~for~~ that I can walk? I sat in a devotional service in Chicago this week. The man who made the prayer could be understood by very few people in the great congregation because he spoke in Spanish. Because I could not understand I watched his face and watching understood his prayer. He was a District Superintendent who had just come in from Cuba. I had been thinking that I had problems! In the hotel lobby the other morning I passed Bishop Booth. He had just flown from the Congo and would return in a few days. I had been talking about the problems of an inner city church! I had never thanked God for my country and for my church. Have you ever thanked God for our amazing world—its beauty, its mystery, its wonder.

"Life has loveliness to sell  
All beautiful and splendid things,  
Blue waves whitened on a cliff,  
Soaring fire that sways and sings,  
And children's faces looking up,  
Holding wonder like a cup.

"Life has loveliness to sell,  
Music like a curve of god,  
Scent of pine trees in the rain  
Eyes that love you, arms that hold,  
And for your spirit's still delight,  
Holy things that star the night."  
(Sara Teasdale)

And finally, provide in abundance for others. "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work." There are flowers that stop blooming if you do not pick them. There are talents that disappear if they go unused. Your reason for thanksgiving will increase as your life reaches out to others. No person can be truly thankful alone. Only as we find ways to help and to give can we be thankful on a dark day. I suggest that this very day you do something for someone else. Remember the admonition of Jesus—Do not invite people who invite you in return. Do not give and expect return. Extend your life by extending your generosity.

#### PRAYER

"For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies, for the love which from our birth over and around us lies: Lord of all, to thee we raise this our prayer and grateful praise."

We praise thee, O God, and we give thanks unto thee for thy providence, for all the blessings and all the hopes of life, for every gift of nature, for our power to love, for our ability to see great visions and to dream great dreams. We thank thee for our hidden blessings which we, in our blindness and misunderstanding may have missed.

On this day we give thee thanks for the blessings of living in a free land, for the untold resources of our country, for liberty to do the things thou hast called us to do. We thank thee for opportunities to learn, for the ability thou hast given us to search out the meanings of life. We are thankful for those pioneers who opened the way and for those who laid the foundations of our national life.

Strengthen and encourage, we pray, all those who, because of the hardness and difficulties of their lives find it difficult to be thankful. If there are those who have suffered personal loss, may they find that thou dost give them that which can never be taken away. Inspire all who do the work of our everyday world, who supply our needs through labor and toil. Grant that they may be not weary but may find satisfaction as co-workers with thee. We thank thee for the likeness of Christ which we see in ordinary people and for their courage and kindness.

Bless all who worship here this day that their lives may be changed and transformed. If we have come here tired send us away rested; if we have come discouraged send us away with new enthusiasm for that which must do this week; if we have come in darkness, send us away in light. In Jesus name we pray. Amen



NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD  
or  
THANKSGIVING ON A DARK DAY

"God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:8

I. A comment on 2 Corinthians 9

- A. This is a rather amazing chapter
  1. Actually Paul is writing about a collection
  2. We should start back in the 8th chapter where he writes: "WE WANT YOU TO KNOW, BRETHREN, ABOUT THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH HAS BEEN SHOWN IN THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA, FOR IN A SEVERE TEST OF AFFLICTION, THEIR ABUNDANCE OF JOY AND THEIR EXTREME POVERTY HAVE OVERFLOWED IN A WEALTH OF LIBERALITY ON THEIR PART."
  3. Then he tells how these churches begged for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints
  4. He talks about this liberal gift which he is administering and indicates that he is sending Titus to collect a gift from the church at Corinth.
- B. Then he writes the tremendous passage which was read for our Scripture.
  1. He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.
  2. God loves a cheerful giver.
  3. God, he says, is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that you may have enough to provide for others.
  4. HE WHO SUPPLIES SEED TO THE SOWER AND BREAD FOR FOOD WILL SUPPLY AND MULTIPLY YOUR RESOURCES AND INCREASE THE HARVEST OF YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

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C. This leads him to this conclusion, that the Corinthian Christians will themselves be enriched by their generosity and will become the producers of thanksgiving.

- D.
  1. All others will be thankful for them and will pray for them because of their generosity
  2. We could talk for a long time about the blessings of generosity
  3. At Thanksgiving time we generally think about things which have been given to us, but here Paul is saying, We ought to be thankful for the opportunity we have to give to others.
  4. God provides us with an abundance so that we may share it with others.

II. Now I can imagine that some of you are thinking that this is an example of the impractical nonsense we find in the Bible, but have you read President Eisenhower's proclamation for our Thanksgiving Day?

- A. Let me quote: "WHEREAS IT IS FITTING AND APPROPRIATE AT THIS TIME OF NATIONAL THANKSGIVING THAT WE SHOULD REMEMBER AND RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE OF OTHER LANDS"
- B. And he goes further and says: "FURTHERMORE, I CALL UPON OUR PEOPLE, WHILE GIVING THANKS FOR OUR BLESSINGS, TO DIRECT THEIR THOUGHTS TO THE PEOPLES OF OTHER LANDS LESS FORTUNATE THAN WE"
- C. He urges his fellow Americans to support and assist the efforts which voluntary citizens groups and religious societies are making toward the solution of the world food problem.
- D. Now I realize that a very complex problem confronts us here

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1. The whole question of over-population is involved
  - a. Personally I think that the Church should become concerned about this
  - b. I think that in a discussion of the stewardship and responsibility of Christian people the population question is one that cannot be avoided

2. But having said that I still maintain that we have also a responsibility to the hungry people of the world.
  - a. These are the people who are the most susceptible to the promises of Communism
  - b. Just on a basis of self-interest we should be concerned.
  - c. But as Christians we have a higher motive than self-interest

E. The grateful heart expresses itself in such a way that other people are given reasons to be grateful

F. And it goes further -- God supplies additional resources--in the words of the Bible PROVIDES IN ABUNDANCE FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.

1. I know some very rich people and I know some very poor people, I know people who are happy and those who are unhappy.
2. But the correlation is not between riches or poverty and happiness--
3. Happiness is related to generosity and generosity is related to thankfulness.

G. Your life becomes full in proportion as you open your life to the needs of others. The President is right. America is great when American is generous.

*I can see this  
in your face*

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III. But this generosity comes, really, only from our deep sense of gratitude to God.

A. Paul says it in the last verse of our chapter: "THANKS BE TO GOD FOR HIS INEXPRESSIBLE GIFT!"

1. The person who knows Christ has a reason for thanks
2. This is deeper than the mere counting of material blessings
3. It means that we can give thanks even on a dark day

B. This morning the choir sang a great hymn for an anthem: "Now thank we all our God."

1. Do you know where that hymn came from? It came out of the darkness of the Thirty Years War in Europe
2. The background of this hymn is death and slaughter, plague and famine. The Four Horsemen were riding over the land when it was written
3. It was not written with a beautiful country church decorated with flowers and fruit in mind
4. It was not written to be sung in a great Cathedral
5. It was written to be sung in a home, as a grace--thanksgiving on a dark day.

