

Harvest Thanksgiving.

Text: Joel 2:23-24, 26

Suggested Hymns:

563, 566, 567, 560, 367

1) Gathering In The Harvest Demands Thanksgiving

2) Our Tribute of Praise

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Joel 2:23–24, 26, ²³ *Be glad then, you children of Zion, And rejoice in the LORD your God; For He has given you the former rain faithfully, And He will cause the rain to come down for you — The former rain, And the latter rain in the first month.* ²⁴ *The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.*

²⁶ *You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, And praise the name of the LORD your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are assembled in God's house on our annual Harvest Thanksgiving Day to offer our tribute of praise and thanksgiving to the great and blessed God. It is proper and right to do so. Blessings call for gratitude. Mercies bestowed demand a public acknowledgement.

Accordingly, we cheerfully flock to the house of God on this day and sing the praises of God who satisfies the desires of every living thing. Let us today consider the obligations to adore and magnify the great and kind Author of all our blessings. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Gathering In The Harvest Demands Thanksgiving

In the first place, we would note that the gathering in of the harvest-fields demands thanksgiving. God's promise has not failed. Each year re-erects, as it were, Noah's altar in our midst and repeats to each generation the promise of God's unfailing and unalterable Word as He says in Genesis 8:22, ²² *"While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease."*

God's goodness went out with the sower as he laid down the precious seed in the bosom of the earth. God's goodness went out with the winter as He scattered His showers over the tender plants. God's goodness went out with the summer sun as it came back from the Equator in the North and looked upon our fields in the South. God's goodness drew clouds when the sun's rays grew hot and the growing grain languished, and He sent down gracious rain from heaven in due season.

And so, God's goodness, having watched, protected, and matured the seed, went out with the farmers and the reapers as they gathered in the grain and bales.

We have not only sufficient for our own necessities, but abundance to pour out for the wants of sufferers in less favoured portions of the world. Golden harvests waved across Australia.

The orchards, too, have borne plentifully. And now, while the farmer puts aside his harvester and bailer he can rest from his toil, reflecting on the bountiful provision God has made for man and beast.

Even though some parts of the country have not been spared from destructive elements, many parts have, so there is a call to us from the field and the granary that we should lift up our hearts and voices in grateful and devout acknowledgement; for, as the text states, "*the LORD your God, ... has dealt wondrously with you.*"

Nor has only agricultural and horticultural prosperity been our portion. God's goodness has gone forth with our industry and enterprise under all its forms. We have had a year of fair business activity. In a time of commercial pressure, due to lack of material and other conditions, the after-effects of the crisis we passed through two years before, the last year has been good.

Manufacturing and retail have met with good returns giving employment to many people supplying their families with the necessities of life.

Among the gifts included in our daily bread, Luther, in the explanation of the Fourth Petition, mentions also good health. This is another reason for thanksgiving.

Again, we are called upon to render thanks to the Author and Giver of every good gift for the fact that our country has enjoyed peace and freedom and their

happy fruits. Peace and freedom are among the choicest blessings which Heaven can bestow upon a nation.

Alas! who justly appreciates them until they are gone? Without them, the enjoyment of any other blessing is small. That we are living in an eventful period of the world I do not need to tell you.

There is tribulation for a great part of the earth. There are wars and unrest in many parts of the civilised world. It has fed upon everything great and sacred. There are vast communities which are being deceived and oppressed by the greed and ambition of wicked leaders.

But while we think about the calamities, strife, and confusion under which some of the nations of the earth are suffering, it ought to increase our gratitude for the peace and civil privileges which we are permitted to enjoy.

Anarchy and dissension dare not as much as be whispered among us. Our citizenship, as never before has shown its interest in the affairs of national and state government. For these precious possessions, peace and freedom, the right of voting, these civil privileges, let us today devoutly thank God.

Another cause which invites our gratitude as a nation is that the means of education, schools, colleges, universities, and libraries, are fostered and extended. This is a thing of great importance. It is equally true that a people must be ignorant before it can be quietly enslaved, and that it must be well informed before it can enjoy freedom.

Hence, under a form of government like ours the cultivation of the mind, the diffusion of knowledge and civilisation is a matter of primary consequence. It therefore gives pleasure to every loyal citizen to see that the schools of learning are fostered in our midst, and that our schools are advanced to a standard which meets the requirements of a modern community.

We have prominent and beautiful structures for our schools of learning, libraries, and professional buildings for the study of science, arts, and mechanics. The schools and other educational institutions throughout the land are multiplying, giving a solid foundation for the expansion and improvement of the faculties with which man is endowed by his Creator, and which make for his welfare and comfort. This is an abundant cause for thanksgiving.

Nor, while mentioning these institutions in our examination, would we overlook the establishment and maintenance of homes for our unfortunate citizens, public housing, public and private hospitals, homes for the aged, blind and demented, deaf and dumb.

Let us bear in mind that all these and others are the fruits of Christianity, the noble products of the Gospel. Many a good person is overtaken in life's pilgrimage by misfortune in old age and dispossessed of a home and of loved ones to care for him.

It is certainly an item worthy of mention and a source of thanksgiving to God that He has in His providence, through the agency of our local government, state, and federal government, as well as through the generosity of individuals, provided such public assistance.

It is as high a praise as can be passed upon any nation to say that it cares for those who are afflicted in body or mind, suffering or destitute. And it ought to be an occasion of gratitude to see the manifestation of such a spirit, the spirit of the Fount of our faith.

This brings us to the last and crowning blessing. There is something more than the blessings of the soil, and of the bread that feeds our body; there is something more than the blessings of health and physical vigour; there is something more than the blessings of civil liberty and security; there is something more than the blessings of earthly knowledge, of mechanical and professional skill.

What that is, you have already answered in your own minds. God's eternity is its sphere; God's only Son is its subject.

Some religion every person on earth must possess. It is a pillar without which no civil society can stand. How happy we are in this respect!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the choicest blessing which God has bestowed upon the inhabitants of this miserable world. His *word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.*¹ It is the balm of our sorrows and the staff of our hopes, as an angel from heaven, cheering us on our way.

It guides us through the perplexed and thorny paths of this unsatisfactory life to a state of rest and glorious immortality. This Gospel we enjoy in its purest

state. No sword of government or civil restraint interferes with its authority and free exercise.

The brightest jewel in our possession is religious liberty, in consequence of which we are privileged to worship God without being interrupted and hindered, according to the dictates of our conscience and convictions. Happy, yes, happy beyond all calculation we are in this respect.

2. Our Tribute of Praise

These then are the blessings for which we are assembled to praise the Author and Giver of them all. Great, indeed, is the sum of them! God has dealt wondrously with us. What return shall we make to the Lord for His goodness? With what shall we repay His love?

First of all, let us attribute our blessings to the true source, the loving-kindness of our heavenly Father. On this day it is expedient for us to recall the meaning of the First Article, and to recite with thoughtfulness:

“I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. *What does this mean?* I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers. He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from every evil. All this He does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.”

Simple words, but significant words, breathing the true Harvest Thanksgiving Day spirit of godliness and of acknowledgement of divine blessings received; and with it let there be contentment.

After all, it is not so much the bountifulness of what is bestowed, as the sense of gratitude with which one receives whatever one receives. A truly grateful heart finds some theme of praise in every hour's experience.

Over the years some harvests are good and others are poor. Nevertheless, we send up our hymns and prayers of praise for what we have received. Ours is to be an appreciation of even a small bestowal of divine goodness and a heart of contentment.

Let us listen to the words of the apostle, as written in 1 Timothy 6:6-8, ⁶ *Now godliness with contentment is great gain.* ⁷ *For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.* ⁸ *And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*

True godliness is faith in the Lord Jesus together with the kind of life that faith produces. This brings contentment, the opposite of dissatisfaction and greed. The world would arouse the latter; the Lord works the former.

Job, a man of wealth, lost everything he had. Yet he could say, *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.”*²

St. Paul echoes the same thought: ⁷ *For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.* The Christian, knowing that earthly possessions are a gift of God for this life only, can say, *“May the name of the Lord be praised for the much or little I have.”* That is true contentment. And that is gain.

What Paul writes can also lead to a proper recognition of life’s true needs. ⁸ *And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.* The word for “clothing” literally means “covering” and includes not only what directly covers the body but also shelter. Food and covering satisfy our basic needs. When God provides these, there can be contentment.

Paul showed such a spirit of contentment when he wrote in Philippians 4:11, *for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.* In other words he is content whether he is in need or whether he has plenty. He is content in any and every situation. Faith speaks in this way. Thus godliness is associated with contentment.

And again, gratitude is not found in sentiment only, but also in practise. May the Lord keep us from a disposition of selfishness, and covetousness, which only receives and is reluctant to bestow. While we enjoy God’s bounties from our well-supplied shelves, let us think of those less fortunate than ourselves and also of those in distress.

Let us not allow an occasion like the present one to pass without the resolve to do something to make others happy. Nor let us close the day before we have

rendered a sincere prayer of gratitude and praise to God the Father who has dealt so wondrously with us.

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,³

Thou art the fount of grace, I know,
And spring so full and free,
Whence saving health and goodness flow
Each day so bounteously.

Rejoice, my heart, rejoice and sing,
A cheerful trust maintain;
For God, the source of everything,
Thy portion will remain. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 119:105

² Job 1:21

³ Hymn 560 v2 &8