



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

November 28, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

Thanksgiving

First Lesson: [Deuteronomy 8:10-18](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 100 (Red Hymnal)

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Philippians 4:10-20](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 17:11-19](#)

Live Like You'll Live Forever: Live a Life of Thanks THE GOOD OF GIVING (THANKS)

1. Good stewardship is _____ and _____.
2. _____ comes from God.
3. God _____ all we need in _____.
4. Thanksgiving flows from _____ and _____.

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Today on Thanksgiving we have a wide range of ages of the people here. We have people in grade school and in high school. We have some people in college and some people just finishing college. Then there are people who it's been a while since you've been in school, a few years, maybe a few decades. I'm asking this more to you, but those of you in high school and college can think about this too. What things/subjects do you wish you would have learned more about when you were in school? Unless you were a scientist, maybe you wish you learned a little bit more about this, but did you wish you learned more about chemistry when you were in school? Or physics? Or persuasive writing? You can think of all the subjects, but what do you wish you learned more about? What I've heard a lot and seen a lot of memes about is people talk about how they wish they would have learned how to do their taxes. They wish they would have learned how to invest and how to use their money wisely.

I actually found this on a shelf in our house. It's from Martin Luther College. I went there but I didn't get this. This is my wife's. It says "Life after school explained." In it there are all sorts of things about leases and insurance and investing and credit cards and fees on credit cards and understanding money in a bigger way. I didn't get one of those. I was going on to more school, so I think they said "Oh, you'll learn more about

this.” But isn’t it true that maybe you wish you would have learned more of that and how to understand the good of money, the good of using it wisely? A lot of what we are going to talk about today is **the good of giving thanks**. The good of how we use what we have and how we can thank God for those things. But a question to consider is, do those things come naturally? Does the wisdom of investing, of using your money wisely, do you just know how to do that? Or do you need to be taught. Does it need to be explained to you? Does it need to be encouraged?

When you look at what Paul is doing with the Philippians, he is really encouraging them. He says: ***¹⁰I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.*** They were talking about this giving for a long time. Then later he says: ***¹⁵Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.*** These Philippians were giving and Paul is encouraging it. He talks about many other churches that didn’t know how to give. They didn’t understand giving. Maybe they didn’t have the opportunity, but they weren’t giving.

When we talk about giving, not just giving but using the things that God has given you, we talk about stewardship. Is good stewardship something you know naturally? Of course not, so we have to understand that *good stewardship is taught and encouraged*. By nature, what do we do with the things that we have, the things that we’ve been given—our talents, our gifts, our house, our home, our money, where do we focus that on? We focus on ourselves. We focus on what I need most and not just only do we not focus on God and the people around us, we fail to really give and help people naturally because we are selfish by nature.

I heard this statistic while I was doing research for the sermon. It said in the last 20 years or so, we’ve grown in population in the United States by over 26 million people to near 30 million people. In that time, do you think the amount of people who give to charity has grown? We have grown by 26 million people, so of course we have grown the number of people who give to church and charity. It has grown by about 10 million, or at least 5 million, but in fact, even though we are growing in size, less people are giving. The statistic said some of the poorest may give about 3% of what they have to charity. The rich maybe give 1%. But do you know what they were all under in giving? They all gave less than what people gave during the Great Depression. During the Great Depression, even though people were suffering in very hard times, they gave out of what they didn’t have, but they still gave. It’s something that we need to be taught and understand that this is something we do.

So think about you and what you give and your thanks to God. Where did you learn to be thankful? Where did you learn how to use your money? Where did you learn how to give back to others or to be wise with what you have? Maybe you're saying, "I'm still learning." A lot of people are. Even if you are older, you might be saying "I'm still learning," but maybe in your household it was something that was taught and encouraged. Maybe it still is. So when you got out into the world, it was very easy because it was something that was discussed. But the truth is I bet there are many people that are still struggling to find peace with finances, to use their gifts, their time, in the right way. That is to encourage you. If you're saying "Ugh, I struggle with this," you're not alone in this. I think it's rather rare for people to be satisfied with their good stewardship.

To understand this is a struggle, we see what needs to be encouraged when Paul is writing to the Philippians. He says these things. ***¹¹I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*** Why is Paul being thankful right now? He's been given more than he needs but he says it's not about that. He says that he would still be content even if he didn't have these gifts, even if he didn't have all of this. Why? He says it's because contentment comes from God. He says ***"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."*** This is the updated translation. It used to say "I can do all things through God who gives me strength." It's not really talking about all things. It's really talking about being content. That only through God can we be content and say "When I don't have a lot, I can still be thankful." "When I have a lot, I can give more."

Contentment is a hard thing for us because we either don't think we have enough, or when we have more, we want more and more and more. "I can be upset. I don't have things. Or even when I have a lot, it's not enough." We struggle with that. We struggle with giving thanks for what God has given us. Moses talks to those Israelites and says even what you have, even your ability to earn and have wealth, comes from God. So we can be content with what we have because they are all blessings.

I think one thing to think about why we struggle with contentment is a lot of the older generation (I'll even include me a little bit in that) had original phones that were something like this (Pastor Enderle holds up a small cell phone). It's something that's small and it maybe had a little screen. I couldn't find my old flip phone, but some people call them "dump phones" or "stupid phones." Some people might still have them and they love their little phones. Now, think of us when we were first getting our phones. I remember getting my first phone in high school. Were your parents really concerned about giving this to you? Were they worried about "If I give them this phone, they are going to get into this trouble" or this or this or this? No, it actually

brought safety. It helped you communicate with your parents. Now think about in today's world. How many of you parents want to give your kids one of these? (Pastor Enderle holds up a smart phone.) Do you want to give it to them in grade school, in middle school, in high school? Do you have good concern about what comes from this?

When I was a teenager, my parents didn't have to teach me how to use my phone or teach me all the dangers of what this phone could do, with social media and all the things that come from the internet that you can do on your phone now. But today do you need to teach how to use a phone correctly, what to do, what to say? You do! I think that's a good picture of why contentment is hard today opposed to maybe back years ago. We can all say "It was simpler then." I think it was in some ways. We are so wealthy today. We have so much stuff. So to be content with what we have is hard. It can do great things, just like the phones today can do amazing things. You can get around. You can order things. You can do all the things you need to do, but it's also dangerous or hard to use in the right way. That's what it is with all the stuff we have. It's hard to be content with what we have.

So what's the solution? What is the answer to being content? Notice as Paul is thanking the Philippians because they have shown their thanks, they have shown that they can give to God and give to Paul in support of the ministry, Paul says this at the end of this section. ***¹⁸I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*** What is Paul telling them? That even though they have given and maybe it hurt to give, God will supply all their needs. *God supplies all we need in Jesus.*

Should we say that again? God will supply all your needs in Jesus. Is that something that is sometimes hard to believe? Do you believe that you have all that you need? Are there times when you are saying "I really need this thing. God, if you would give me this thing, it would be a lot better." God tells us we have all we need in Jesus, but I think we can struggle with that. I think we can struggle with that contentment. We can struggle with understanding what God has given us because we are not focused on the spiritual stuff. God has given us everything we need in Jesus.

Paul writes also in the Book of Romans. ***³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*** (Romans 8:32) You have something through Jesus that nothing can buy. You can't earn it. You can't work days and weeks and a whole career to get this. You can't put it on a plaque. You can't earn it. You can't barter for it. You can't trade for it. It's the forgiveness of sins. As we said last Sunday when we read the meaning of the 2nd Article of the Apostles Creed, we've been redeemed; not with gold or silver but with His innocent, precious blood, His innocent death. This is something you cannot get on your

own and it has to be given. It's a gift. It's grace. It's forgiveness. It's that mercy and peace that you have through Christ. How rich is that! It's immeasurably valuable. It's a peace and forgiveness in your life that though you sin, though you fall short, though you doubt, though you fear, though you struggle with money, though you struggle with fears and worries of the past, the future, the present, you are forgiven. You have a peace and a mercy and forgiveness that nothing can take away. God so loved you to do this and then to give you eternity. All the things that we have can fade away. They can be taken away in an instant. They can be lost. But your soul is eternal. Your soul is what Christ has won and redeemed and it means that you will live forever—as our whole theme has been talking about. So we can be thankful because we do live forever.

One of my favorite pictures of this is from one of the pastors I listen to a lot, Pastor Novotny, who is on the Time of Grace. He talked about how they were in a meeting for Time of Grace talking about their new book and their plans and then they said "What happens if this book doesn't sell well or if people stop giving and if someone gets sick?" He said, "So, we'd be left with God?" Would that be such a bad thing? Are we satisfied with God? Are we satisfied with Jesus and all that He gives us? Sometimes it's hard. But to know that He is enough, that He is good. He has blessed you and forgiven you and given you a peace and forgiveness that so many people in the world are striving and looking for.

What does that do for us in our life? We are talking about the good of giving and the good of giving thanks. As Paul is thanking the Philippians and saying "Thank you for what you've done. Thank you for your outpouring. Thank you for your kindness," how can we be thankful? I think truly, *thanksgiving flows from contentment and stewardship*. If I'm not content, if I'm not happy with what God has given me, am I going to have a heart that gives? If I don't understand stewardship, good stewardship, that everything I have, whose is it? It is God's. EVERYTHING you have; your family—as you go home today and have your Thanksgiving meal, your cars, your house, the food you eat, the family, the friends, all of these things are God's. They are on loan to you and they are for you to use to praise God and to bless others. God has given them as a blessing to you. They are not ours. The problem is if we hold onto them as being ours, what do we do? We are holding onto everything so tightly and we're so fearful if we lose it, but if we understand that this is not ours but God's, we can be generous with it.

I like this example for explaining stewardship. Stewardship is a picture of being a manager. If you have ever watched The Office (I know I'm starting to age myself because now The Office is getting old), if you are a manager of God's gifts, of your talents, your gifts, your money, your house and home, what does that make you? It makes you Michael Scott—the regional manager. If you are training and teaching and encouraging your children, what are you building up? Little Dwight Schrutes—the assistant to the regional manager—you are developing managers of what God has given you.

But to think about this in thanksgiving and good stewardship and being content—is it hard to give? I think at times it is hard to give. But how does it become an easy thing?

They just started basketball over at school and when you first start shooting for practice, are you tired? Are your arms tired? If you haven't been running—if you play basketball you run lines back and forth, back and forth, and after the first few practices, you are just exhausted. But that's meant to train you so that in a game you're not so tired. Then after a few weeks, you can do those runs and it's easy. Right now if I were asked to do a shuttle, would I want to do that? What would I be afraid of? I'm not in shape, so what would happen? I'd run and I'm going to pull my hammy.

Is that what happens in our life of giving when we don't practice giving? Something simple becomes something fearful because I don't do it. But when I give, when I give thanks to God, it can happen easily because when you do it all the time, it's just a natural thing. You can do that here. You can do that in giving to others in need. And a way we are talking more about in the future is just that direct deposit of saying, "When I get money from God, then I can give in a generous way." Or we can give today to help those in need in our community in our offering. But an important thing to understand as we talk about this is that it all flows from contentment and stewardship, understanding God and His mercy; understanding my contentment that I have all things in God. It's not about consistence and being comfortable in giving. I also have to be comfortable with God.

The encouragement is also to grow in the Word, to be in the Word consistently because that is what helps us be thankful; to understand who God is and what He has given me; to understand my place and understand that I don't have to be afraid. I don't have to fear the future. I don't have to fear the past. I don't have to fear my past mistakes. God gives me a true contentment in Christ.

So as you grow and you ask "How can I give thanks?" know and grow in your knowledge of your Lord and Savior and ALL that He has given up for you. He gave EVERYTHING for you. He loves you so much to die for you, to forgive you of your sins, so we have all that we can give back. Not out of a demand. Not for anything to earn. But out of good—the good of giving thanks to our God, who loves us and has forgiven us and has given us ALL that we need. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.