

# NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Thanksgiving – October 13<sup>th</sup>, (11:11 am)

**THANKS TO THE LORD!**

Psalm 67

**Deuteronomy 8:1–10**

**Philippians 4:10–20**

Luke 17:11–19

## ***We Praise God for Sustaining Life in and through His Word***

The nation resounds with thanksgiving for the earth's bountiful harvest, crops of wheat and grains, all beneath the canopy of God's almighty care. But *"man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD"* (Deut. 8:1–10). The Church is the vessel through which the Word of God penetrates the world with its Law and Gospel. It is this divine Word that proclaims Jesus as the sole source of life, health and wholeness. It is Jesus who heals lepers with His Word: *"Go and show yourselves to the priests"* (Luke 17:11–19). Of the 10 cleansed, only one expresses thanksgiving back to Jesus. But true gratitude proceeds from a heart sustained by faith. Jesus bids this one Samaritan to *"rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."* So also, we are sent from the Divine Service, bolstered in our faith by baptismal and Eucharist blessings to be thankful in our circumstances of plenty and hunger, abundance and need (Phil. 4:6–20).

*In country, town, or city, some people can be found  
who spend their lives in grumbling – at everything around.  
Oh, yes, they always grumble, no matter what we say,  
for these are chronic grumblers, and they grumble night and day.  
They grumble in the city. They grumble on the farm.  
They grumble at their neighbors. They think it is no harm.  
They grumble at their husbands. They grumble at their wives.  
They grumble at their children. But the grumbler never thrives.  
They grumble when it is raining, they grumble when it's dry...  
And if the crops are failing, they grumble and they sigh.  
They grumble at the prices, and they grumble when they slide...  
They grumble all the year around. And they grumble 'till they die.*

Well, I will not talk about grumbling and complaining even though grumbling and complaining happens in our lives from time to time. Hum... I think that we would like to grumble or complain more but we keep it inside. Today we will talk about **THANKS TO THE LORD** because tomorrow will be the **THANKSGIVING DAY**.

Thanksgiving is associated with the harvest in all peoples and nations. The Feast of the Harvest or Mowing in the Old Testament (Hebrew ***hag haqasir***<sup>1</sup>), has received this name because it is a harvest of grain, wheat, and barley<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.verareflexoes.com/single-post/2016/06/16/Pentecost-the-descent-of-the-Holy-Spirit-Part-one> - The feast of the Harvest - in Hebrew ***hag haqasir***. Because it is a harvest of grain, wheat and barley, this party won that second name. Probably, ***hag haqasir*** the Feast of the Harvest is the original name (Ex 23:16).

<sup>2</sup><https://pt.m.wikipedia.org/wiki:Cevada>

## **A COMPLAINING SOCIETY – STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE<sup>3</sup>**

In Deuteronomy 8 there is the exhortation to not forget the benefits God has given to the people of Israel. People complained too much, even though God helped them all the time. God called them "**stiff-necked,**" that is, "**hard-headed**" people. He freed the people from their slavery in Egypt, and they still complained; He provided water for them, and they would complain again; he gave them food from Heaven (quail and manna), and again they complained and criticized. *Do you see a pattern here? Do you see any parallels to the modern world?*

By the way, it seems that if a person does not complain or criticize things every so often or has no strong opinion, that person will not have that much credibility in society today. "Or perhaps he or she is a privileged person, with a good life, and is not suffering/having troubles as I am". Now you imagine living with people who complain, criticize, and speak their mind all the time and anywhere. *Imagine the situation: you do a certain thing, and someone says, "I think this is not good, eh? In my time I did it differently and better; I did this and that. You must do it differently... Or imagine people who have an opinion about everything and speak their mind all the time. They can be very inconvenient. Imagine a conversation circle and then an outsider joins it to give their opinion without knowing what is going on and without being invited. **Isn't something missing there?***

Well, I am not saying that criticizing, being sincere and having an opinion is bad, but there is a good time for that, especially when we are invited to do so, and when there is familiarity between people. But it is equally important to have tact and sensitivity.

I will go back to the question then: **When people complain too much, is that there is something missing in their hearts?**

## **A GRATEFUL HEART – THE BEST WAY**

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians says that he "**learned to live content in any and every situation<sup>4</sup>**" that is, he learned to live GRATEFUL IN ANY SITUATION. Whether in joy, in sadness, in the abundant or not so abundant harvest, with people who complain or not... he has learned to live grateful and content. The apostle was imprisoned but still sent letters, in this case to the Philippians, to encourage faith and to show gratitude to all. He mentions that he rejoices with the people of this community, he thanks them for helping him in many of his past difficulties; he thanks God because that congregation has God's Word in their midst, which encourages them to develop and keep their hearts grateful for all blessings – both small and big things.

<sup>3</sup> Ex 32:9 – **And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, <sup>(a)</sup>it is a stiff-necked people.** Cross references: Exodus 32:9 : ch. 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; 31:27; 2 Chr. 30:8; Acts 7:51; [Isa. 48:4] English Standard Version (ESV) The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> ESV version – "**for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content**".

**A GRATEFUL HEART IS A WONDERFUL THING.** It attracts people to God and to the faith, to the church and around you. People who have a strong faith usually have a thankful heart. They know for a fact what God has done for them. They look around and see his blessings. They are not blind to the troubles and conflicts in this world, but they know that the frame on the picture of their life is God's amazing love in Christ and his son's death on the cross for the sins of the world. They never forget that. And that puts in their hearts an attitude of gratitude. Constant negativity among Christians turns outsiders away from the faith. It distracts them from the true message of the faith. It doesn't allow them to see Christ as he really is. Constant negativity poisons the waters. And, as the Scripture says, **the joy of the Lord is my strength.**

The apostle Paul was in a prison and, as you remember, he used to be a Jewish persecutor of Christians before. He hated Christians but was converted by God on the road to Damascus. Before he was a persecutor, now he becomes a persecuted person because of Christ. He had a life of much suffering and hardship through persecution, and in his life, he frequently saw God's action in protecting, giving faith, realizing how powerful God's Word is and how great His goodness is. As a result, he had a grateful heart, which we can see in the words of this epistle.

I believe that suffering and trial develop gratitude. People who have everything have not suffered much and have not gone through trials may have more difficulty in having a grateful heart because they cannot see how much they are protected and blessed. It is not uncommon to see people like this complaining and criticizing, **life is cruel, I have no money, I have no opportunities, no one helps me the way I want...** etc.

Faith makes me happy and thankful all the time. To be thankful in all situations, to thank even in bad moments, to thank for what we have and what we don't have, to thank for the difficulty, the sufferings, and trials, to thank for the harvest, to thank for the snow... **everything is grace, everything is good because God is good all the time with the whole world.** Just know and see with the eyes of faith as the apostle Paul: **"learned to live content, learned to live grateful in any and every situation."** This is maturity, this is the development of faith, this gratitude, this is having a grateful heart all the time.

Suffering and trial develop gratitude. May we learn to live content and gratefully in any situation as well. May God grant us a grateful heart for the big and the small things, the bad and the good things too. In Jesus' name. Amen.