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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Thanksgiving Eve

November 23, 2016

Text: Philippians 4:6–20

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Don't we live in an anxious world? There's always something to worry about, to be anxious about. Fear can so easily grip our lives robbing us of peace, joy, and contentment. What's so tragically ironic about our anxieties is that they are often created by things that are completely out of our control. I have no control over who President-elect Trump will appoint to his cabinet. I have no control over the price of oil or the cost of bread and milk at the grocery store. And yet, these kinds of things – politics, the economy, the basic necessities of life like food – are what generate anxiety in our hearts and minds.

But God's Word from tonight's epistle reading encourages us to a different way, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (vs. 6). Do not be anxious about anything, anything! Sounds like a pretty tall order for a world filled with anxiety.

Not let's be clear about one thing. Anxiety is nothing new to the 21st century. The very fact that the apostle Paul mentions it in his inspired letter reflects that anxiety is part and parcel of the human condition. Keep in mind that the apostle himself wrote this Philippian letter while imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. He knows quite well the concerns and anxieties of this earthly life. Anxiety is common to our human condition.

But to us who are baptized into God's eternal life and glory, there is an answer to anxiety and fear: prayer to our heavenly Father generously saturated with thanksgiving. Prayerful thanksgiving is the way to which we are called as God's redeemed children.

Prayer is not a Christianized form of positive thinking. Quite the contrary, prayer is the living breath of our most holy faith that fears, loves, and trusts in our Savior God above all things. We Christians are afforded a privilege that no others are given:

immediate, ongoing, and ubiquitous access to God the Father's presence. Our heavenly Father has commanded us to come into His presence with boldness and confidence whenever we wish (i.e., Heb. 4:16). And He has promised to hear us. For we are baptized into the death and resurrection of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and filled, heart, mind, and body with the blessed Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus taught us to ask, seek, and knock. Such divine commands are coupled with the unqualified promise that we will receive, find, and it shall be opened to us (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9). In addition to God's command and promise, Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede with us and for us as we pray (Rom. 8).

Our prayers and supplications are offered with a very particular mindset. Thanksgiving! Christian thanksgiving is knowing who God is and His desire to give us all the riches of His love, life, and eternal glory. Christian thanksgiving is receiving these gifts in faith from God the Father who gives them to us in and through His Son, Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thanksgiving is the very mindset and attitude that permeates everything we are and everything we do. The phrase of vs. 6, "in everything" applies also to our giving of thanks. "... In everything, by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

Tonight's reading from the Small Catechism highlights this attitude of giving thanks to God in all things and for all things. Luther taught us that God "has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my senses...He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support his body and life...For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him." The color of your eyes, the size of your ears, the acuity of your senses...God gave them to you. Those clothes you're wearing, the house you live in, the car you drive, the pets you have, those flesh and blood relatives and friends you have...God gave them to you. All that is needed to sustain us in this earthly life is given to us by the Father Almighty.

Remember those three areas of life I mentioned at the beginning, those anxiety-creating examples of politics, economics, and basic necessities of life? Our heavenly Father provides us with all that we need in those areas and so much more. The reason we need not be anxious is that our heavenly Father promises to take care of all things for us! To the Roman Christians St. Paul writes (8:31–32), "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but *gave him up for us all*, how will he not also with him *graciously give us all*

things?” No need for anxiety. God the Father has already given us the greatest gift of all: His beloved Son, Jesus. And if the Father gave us Jesus, how will He not also “graciously give us all things”? The rhetorical question comes with its own powerful answer. Our Father gives us *all things* in Christ, because of Christ, and through Christ. Instead of being anxious over President-elect Trump’s cabinet appointees, or the price of oil, or the cost of bread and milk, take them to our Father in prayer “casting all your anxieties upon Him, for He cares for you (I Peter 5:7).

And yet there is one more promise I want to highlight before we conclude tonight. It’s Philippians 4:7. As a result of prayerful thanksgiving, “...the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Anxiety is replaced with transcendent peace. That’s God’s promise in Christ.

So yes, enjoy your festivities and the ones celebrating with you tomorrow. Receive them with prayer and thanksgiving. Do not be anxious. For the God who answers prayer in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit fills you with His divine peace and guards your hearts and minds in Christ unto eternal joy and glory.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.