

Thanksgiving Eve, Wednesday, November 25, 2020

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

God Shall Bless Us

Psalm 67

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

“God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!” (v 7).

What does the psalmist say? What words of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving does he place into our mouths? What promise does he plant in our hearts? These strong words, this bold promise, from the last verse of our psalm for Thanksgiving:

GOD SHALL BLESS US (v 7).

God shall bless us. But what do you hear when hear this? The word that first jumps out at me is the word “bless.” To me, the word “bless” sounds like a cornucopia filled with all sorts of good things, or like the Land of Sweets from the Nutcracker Ballet with images of treats dancing through my head, or like a Christmas tree loaded underneath with piles and piles and piles of stuff I want. Is that how you hear it, too? As a blank check that you can fill out however you want? As a promise that good times are back again and here to stay? As an indicator of a bull market in which the Dow just keeps going up and up forever?

Strange, isn't it? We live in an age of abundance. Life spans haven't been this long since Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet it seems like we always expect more—more blessings from God, more stuff, more health, more wealth, more, more, more. That's what I do with the word “bless.” I turn it into more stuff for me. Ancient kings would've given an arm-and-a-leg for things you and I get in Wal-Mart or the triple antibiotic from the pharmacy, but we hardly count those as blessings. I'm reminded of the crowd that Jesus fed in the wilderness. They were so thankful for the bread He gave them that they wanted to make Him their bread king, as if being a baker were the best thing Jesus could do for them. I'm also reminded of the people in His hometown. They'd heard about the miracles He did in other places and were really put out that He wasn't doing more for them, as if opening a family medical practice in Nazareth were the best thing He could've done there. Sometimes we even treat Jesus this way with respect to

spiritual things. We may think of Him merely as the guy who punches our ticket to heaven, just a conductor. Far from it! To be with Him *is* heaven.

But this is what sinful humanity does with God. It turns Him into the servant of our desires, our wants, our dreams. God is made to serve our purposes, whether that's economic prosperity, free enterprise, social reform, democracy, happiness, security, or peace of mind. We change the Lord's Prayer into our own prayer and say, "My will be done." Even certain strands of Christianity fall into this. They say that God wants to bless, but by bless they mean health and wealth here and now. Name it and claim. Just believe. What a bunch of hogwash!

The psalmist certainly wants us to recognize and enjoy the blessings of God, including the increase, bounty, and fruits of the earth. So, please do praise God for the cornucopia and the sweets and the presents! Praise Him for turkey and stuffing and pumpkin pie! We have many wonderful gifts from our God. Enjoy them! He has fulfilled His promise in part by blessing the earth, by giving good weather and harvests of plenty, by providing parents and other authorities for the support of this life, and through His gifts of health, skills, work, family, and possessions. But we're mistaken if we think that's all there is to "**God shall bless us**" (v 7). That hardly even scratches the surface! No, "bless" means far more than baked goods and clean bills of health. Moses hints at it when he recounts the forty years spent wandering in the wilderness: "**[The Lord] humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna . . . that He might make you know that man lives not by bread alone, but by every word that comes from His mouth**" (Deut 8:3). God was with them. He was with them in the wilderness when they hungered and thirsted. And He was with them when they walked through the valley of the shadow of death. Even in trials, tribulations, pandemics, suffering, they could say, and we can say with them, "**God shall bless us**" (v 7).

What would happen if we took the focus off the word "bless" and focused instead on the word "God"? If we stopped looking so much at the gifts and looked instead to the Giver? *God* shall bless us. No matter what else He gives or fails to give, He gives us Himself. It's implied in the First Commandment. As believers, we don't need to have any other gods because the true God has graciously become our God. He Himself—not just what He gives or does, not just the bread or the healing, but He Himself is the blessing, and His name is the blessing, for by it we call upon Him, and His Word is the blessing, for through His Word we come to know Him and have Him as our God. There's a question connected to the First Commandment that I've always found striking. It's this: Have I clung to what God takes away even though He gives me Himself? He gives me Himself. *God* shall bless us. *He* is our blessing, and no other. It is

enough for us that we have Him, even if we have nothing else. God shall bless by being our God.

How do we know that He is our God? We know that He is our God through Jesus. Every blessing of God, including God Himself, flows from the fact that Jesus came to be our Savior from sin. It flows from the cross. Through Jesus, because He has taken away the sin of the world, we are reconciled to God. So God does indeed wish to serve us, but He wishes to serve us in keeping with His own will, not ours. We pray, "Thy will be done." And what is the good and gracious will of God? He **desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth**" (1 Tim 2:4). Our psalm says the same thing. God blesses us and gives Himself to us, **"that Your may be known on earth, Your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God, let all the peoples praise You! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Let all the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You"** (vv 2-5). God shall bless us, His people, the Church, so that all peoples might come to know Him. The goal of His blessing, the purpose behind everything He gives, is the salvation of the whole world! We believe in God's salvation through Christ *and* we proclaim it to all the world, and so God blesses them, too, just as He blesses us!

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us (v 1), or as we hear so often: **"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace"** (Num 6:24-26). His words give what they say. They give His blessing, because they give us Him. "I will be Your God," He says. "I will bless You." God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit do bless us and shall bless us, and the greatest blessing of all will be to stand before the throne, to be in His presence, to see our God face-to-face!

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
