

“You, O Lord, Have Made Me Glad by Your Work”

In the name of him through whom we give all praise, honor, glory, and thanks to God our heavenly Father, dear friends in Christ: I confess that I'm quite fond of the service of Compline, which we're using this evening. It's got a contemplative mood that just feels right for an evening service. That's why I like to use it for our midweek Lenten services as we have for a number of years: it fits suitably with the penitential character of the season. And this may make you wonder why I chose this order of worship for *this* particular evening on which we're celebrating Thanksgiving, which, one would think, ought to have a more joyful and upbeat tenor.

If that's what you're wondering (and even if you're not), I'd like to direct you to pay attention to the actual words we used in the opening sentences of the service. After asking the Lord to give us a quiet night, which means a safe and secure night's rest; and then peace at the last, which is a prayer for a blessed end in the faith, when we finally close our eyes in the sleep of death; these sentences follow:

It is good to give *thanks* to the Lord,
To *sing praise* to your name, O Most High;
To herald your love in the morning (that is to declare how wonderful God's love is when we first arise),
Your truth at the close of the day (which means at the end of the day to remind ourselves aloud how faithful the Lord is in keeping his promises).

You see, despite the somber tone of the service, the words themselves really are quite upbeat. They are a call to worship and give thanks to God. And in case you didn't recognize them, these lines are the first two verses of Psalm 92, which we also read together earlier – and which just happens to be the text for this evening's message. I chose it because through it the psalmist does more than merely invite us to give thanks to the Lord, he also tells us why we should do it. That's the fourth verse, in which we read:

For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work;
At the works of your hands I sing for joy.

In more Thanksgiving messages than I care to remember, I have stressed the primary reason we are to give thanks to God. It isn't that he needs to be thanked. Strictly speaking, the Lord has no needs. Unlike us, it doesn't hurt his feelings when he does something especially thoughtful or caring for someone and doesn't get thanked for it. God is love. It's his nature to give lavishly to the creatures he's made with no thought of what he'll get out of it. That isn't the way he is. But we do need to give thanks, not for his sake; but for ours. The Scriptures explain that everything we have is a gift from God. And when we forget to give thanks for the gifts, we soon forget the Giver of the gifts. And if we forget about him, we're lost, no matter how much we have. So it's for our own sakes that we're to be thankful to the Lord. Besides, we have words for people who receive gifts without gratitude or expressions of appreciation. If they're adults we call them insufferable ingrates; if they're children we call them spoiled brats or little monsters. They are the centers of their own little universes, and they feel that the world and everyone else owes them everything they've got and more. And no one can stand to be around them. Well, we are God's children. And he doesn't want us to be like that because it's bad for

us. He wants what's good for us. And so he wants us to be thankful because thankfulness is good for us.

That's the *primary* reason to give thanks to the Lord; but the psalmist gives us a second reason. It's this: the Lord makes us, his people, *glad* by the things he does. That is to say, thankfulness is not just a sense of gratitude, it's also an expression of joy. And in view of God's great and powerful works on our behalf, we ought very much to be joyful.

Just think of the things he's done for us. Take all of creation: God didn't make it for himself; he made it to give it to us. You name it: plants, animals, rivers and mountains, seas and deserts, forests and fields, the stars and planets, the people who fill our lives with love ... all the wondrous, beautiful, quirky, and amazing things of the creation—the Lord certainly doesn't need any of it. He made it all for us to enjoy. And he filled it with infinite variety and different ways to experience it, giving us the senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell so that we could distinguish colors and textures and flavors and aromas; there's music and motion, cool and warmth, light and shadow ... it's really quite extraordinary when you consider the creative genius he exerted on our behalf. And not only did he make it all for us, he keeps on sustaining it. He designed it so that it would continue to give to us – so that we would continue to enjoy the manifold gifts of his creation, and give thanks to him for it.

The Psalmist says, "The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this". He means unbelievers, those who don't know and trust the Lord. It's funny, in our day people who believe that the Lord created all things like we do are held in contempt by those who are supposedly wise and learned. They think *we're* the stupid ones because they simply *know* that all things came into existence on their own, by accident through natural processes. The result is that while they too can marvel at the wonders of world and enjoy them, there's a fundamental difference in the way they see things. I saw a clear example of this two summers ago when we were on the trip to the Higher Things Youth Conference in Las Vegas. To make the trip more interesting, we stopped at some of the national parks for short visits. At one, Arches National Monument in Utah, we drove in and were soon surrounded by all kinds of weird, towering rock formations. It was like being on another planet. The kids were fascinated. And I heard one of them say, "You can't tell me that God didn't make this place." You see, for the unbeliever such sights can be interesting curiosities and natural wonders; but that's about all. For the believer, by contrast, they are gifts that God gave us to enjoy. They are evidence of his love; proof that he delights in making us glad by his work. And this is true of all things that he made from the spectacular wonders of nature to all the mundane things we enjoy and take for granted every day. The Lord gives them to us to fill our lives with joy.

Of course, we who are believers have so much more cause to be joyful and to give thanks to the Lord. As good as the gifts that the Lord gives us through his work of creation are, they pale in comparison to the gifts of we receive through his works of redemption and salvation. The Psalmist expresses this when he continues on about how the Lord defeats, scatters, and triumphs over his enemies. Who are they? The Lord's enemies are those who threaten and hurt his children. This includes all who oppose the Lord's will; but the main offenders are the devil, the temptations and distractions of the world, and our own sinful, fallen flesh. These are what harm us most by enslaving us and leading us to everlasting destruction.

But for us the Lord has beaten them. He did it by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross when he gave himself for our sin. By this enormous work – his suffering and dying – our God set us free, and he raised us up with Jesus with the promise to bring us to everlasting life. The Psalmist expresses his joy over this by saying, "You have exalted my horn like that of the wild

ox; you have poured over me fresh oil”; which is an ancient Hebrew way of saying “You set an elaborate crown on my head, and you have prepared me for a royal celebration”. Through Christ’s work of redemption for us, this is exactly what the Lord does: he washes away our sin, he anoints us with his Spirit, and he crowns us with righteousness and life – and if that doesn’t make you glad, then nothing will.

And even then the Lord isn’t done working on our behalf to make us glad. The Psalmist continues,

“The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God.
They still bear fruit in old age ...”

He refers to our life together here in the Church where we continue to receive the gifts of his saving grace. And it’s interesting that he compares us to two different kinds of trees. The first, the palm tree, is known for its ability to survive and flourish in even the harshest conditions: in the desert where the heat is brutal, the soil is sand, and water is scarce. The image speaks of the Church’s ability to thrive and grow even when it suffers persecution and tribulation. The second tree mentioned, a cedar of Lebanon, was known for its large size, graceful beauty, and strength. This speaks of the Church’s true strength and beauty, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and how the Lord intends for it to grow to include vast numbers of people from all nations.

The point is that the Church is where and how the Lord continues the work of redeeming and sanctifying his people. And through his work on them, they too work to bear fruit for the Lord and for one another: namely the fruits of love. This too is designed to make us joyful in the Lord. And out of our gladness, we give thanks and praise to him.

So, let’s do that. Today and every day that follows, let us give thanks to the Lord, each one of us saying,

For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work;
At the works of your hands I sing for joy.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!