THANKSGIVING - - - SERMON,

Delivered November 28, 1895, in Christ M. P. Church, Chestertown, Md.,

BY REV. W. P. COMPTON

TEXT: I Thes., V chap., 18th verse. In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

We are assembled here to-day in this house of worship in obedience to the request of the President of these United States and of the Governor of the State of Maryland.

The president has issued this proclamation, "The constant goodness and forbearance of Almighty God, which have been vouchsafed to the American people during the year which is just passed, call for their sincere acknowledgement of devout gratitude. To the end therefore that we may with thankful hearts unite in extolling the loving care of our Heavenly Father, I Grover Cleveland, President of the United States do hereby appoint and set apart Thursday, the 28th day of the present month of November, as a day of thanksgiving and prayer, to be kept and observed by all our people. On that day let us forego our usual occupation, and in our accustomed places of worship join in rendering thanks to the Giver of every good and perfect gift for the bounteous returns that have rewarded our labors in the fields and in the busy marts of trade, for the peace and order that have prevailed throughout the land, for our protection from pestilence and dire calamity, and for the other blessings that have been showered upon us from an open hand. And with our thanksgiving let us humbly beseech the Lord to so incline the hearts of our people unto Him that He will not leave us nor forsake us as a nation, but will continue to us His mercy and protecting care, guiding us in the path of national prosperity and happiness, endowing us with rectitude and virtue and keeping alive within us a patriotic love for the free institutions which have been given us as a national heritage.

"And let us also on the day of our thanksgiving especially remember the poor and needy, and by deeds of charity let us show the sincerity of our gratitude."

This is the proclamation of our President. But let us remember that we are here in obedience to the will of a higher ruler, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. His proclamation is found in many places in his holylaw, but is epitomized in our text. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Then let us hope that every one of us are here in obedience to a third will, for if this will be not in our worship our coming is in vain. In Leviticus XXII 29 we find these words: "And when ye will offer a sacrafice of thanksgiving unto the Lord, offer it at your own will." Let us hope that all have come up this morning urged first of all by his or her own will saying: "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord. I was glad when they said unto me let us go up to the house of the Lord for this purpose. I will give thanks unto the Lord in the great congregation."

This custom of public thanksgiving as we will see by these passages of scripture, and many others, is as old as creation. The offerings of Cain and Abel were thank offerings unto God. The rules for the thank offering are found in the Levitical law. David gives many psalms of thanksgiving. Our Lord gave thanks unto the Father on all occasions, and the custom has prevailed in the church of Christ in all time.

Thanksgiving day as an annual religious festival in the United States owes its origin to a desire of the Puritans for greater simplicity in the forms of worship of the established church, and a purpose not to celebrate any of the numerous festival days of that church. An occasional day of thanksgiving has been recommended by the civil authorities of Europe, and such a day was observed in Leyden, Holland, Oct. 3rd, 1575, the first anniversary of the deliverance of that city from siege. Before the adoption of an annual Thanksgiving day we find mention of several appointments for special reasons. After the first harvest at Plymouth in 1621, Gov. Bradford sent four men out fowling that they "might after a more special manner rejoice together." In July 1623, the governor appointed a day of thanksgiving for rain after a long drought, and the record shows a similar appointment in 1623 because of the arrival of supplies from Ireland. There is also recorded the appointment of days of Thanksgiving in Massachusetts in 1632, 1633, 1634 and 1637 and in Plymouth in 1651, 1668, 1680, when the form of the recommendation indicates that it had become an annual custom. The Dutch governors of New Netherlands in 1644, 1645, 1655 and 1664, and the English governors of New York in 1755 and 1760 appointed days of thanksgiving. During the Revolution Thanksgiving day was observed by the nation, being annually recommended by Congress; but there was no national appointment between the general thanksgiving for peace in 1784 and 1789 when President Washington recommended a day of thanksgiving for the adoption of the constitution. Since that time special days have been set apart by presidents and governors until 1864, when the present practice was adopted of a national annual thanksgiving. The president issues an annual proclamation followed by the governors of the several States and mayors of the principal cities. Custom has fixed the time for the last Thursday in November. And we are now here in obedience to that prevailing custom in this year of our Lord, 1895, the living monument of God's goodness and mercy.

And, oh, as we stand to review these things today, looking to God the author and finisher of all good, we cannot but exclaim:

How do Thy mercies close us round!
Forever be Thy name adored;
We blush in all things to abound,
The servant is above his Lord.

And while we are exhorted in everything to give thanks we propose to inquire briefly concerning these mercies under the head of National blessings, Church blessings, Personal blessings. Trusting that a consideration of these things will make us more grateful to a bountiful Father, who, as President Cleveland has suggested, has held over us during the past year an open hand and scattered in our pathway innumerable blessings.

As suggested by a national proclamation the causes of gratitude are national. In many things the American peop can devoutly thank God and say in th language of holy writ, "He hath n dealt so with any other people." Th American republic has not only take its place among the nations of the ear but it has taken its place as the fi nation of the earth in things that co stitute a nation's prosperity, happine and peace.

A writer in commenting on the ha times which the American people we passing through truthfully remarks th the American can be thankful becau the hard times in our beloved Republ are better than the good times of th other nations of the earth. In no natio on the earth are the masses of the pe ple so prosperous, so well fed and we clothed. Those things which have con to be regarded as necessities in the hon of the American mechanic and labor are regarded as luxuries by his brethre beyond the seas.

To cite one illustration. Meat is r garded as a necessity on the table of th American laborer. In Europe in th home of the skilled mechanic it is regar ed and indulged in as a luxury. An i telligent lady, the wife of a sober ar industrious skilled mechanic of Englan who emigrated to New York and secure employment there at three times th wages received in England, remarked t the reporter in comparing the countrie In England we could afford to indulg in meat but once a week, a boiling pie for the Sabbath dinner was the exte of our indulgence in that line. Such thing as a Sabbath dress was unknow Neither a sewing machine or organ. M husband and sons had no overcoats an no extra clothing for the Sabbath attire; our home was meagerly furnished as well as our table and wardrobe; here said she, we have all these things. A comfortable well furnished home. The best of food, several changes of raiment, my husband and sons have overcoats and what we call Sabbath suits. We have sewing machine and organ—in fact it seems every necessity and many luxuries, and we are supremly happy. She concluded by saying God bless America; happy indeed is such a people! We quote this lady because the home she describes is the home of the average American laborer; where it is otherwise it is because intemperance or other causes have entered and banished prosperity. Or where, perchance, in some exceptional cases, sickness or some unusual or unavoidable calamity has reversed the fortune of those who formerly enjoyed all these things.

But of course not being in a position to compare ourselves and our homes with the people and homes of other nations we fail to appreciate our blessings and to be sufficiently grateful to the Giver of all good that our lot has been cast in such a country.

Not only have we occasion to thank God for food and raiment, and homes of comfort, and freedom from the wants and woes of nations less blessed. But we have reason to thank God for the civil and religious liberty which we enjoy. In our blessed land we may not only worship God but we may worship Him according to the dictates of our own conscience. No State laws control the worship of the people. Every man and woman may chose their own church, embrace their own creed and find liberty to worship as they will. In affairs of government we choose our own rulers. While there is much to deplore in the manner in which elections are conducted in some places, the voter if corruptly influenced can only be influenced by his own will and not by force and violence and fear, as in some so-called republics.

We have reason also to be thankful to God for the peaceful manner in which elections are conducted and changes of government or governing power is effected. We have recently passed through an exciting campaign which has resulted in many places in the deposing one political party and the establishing of another.

But have we not abundant reason to be thankful that so little animosity is engendered thereby, that so little friction attends these changes? That such good humor and consideration of feeling marks contests. Everywhere the sentiment for we be brethern seems to prevail and victor and vanquished continue to dwell together in unity and peace. All these things are causes of felicitation congratulation, thanksgiving; and while the pessimist may point to the degenerating tendencies from the abuse of the elective franchise on this occasion, when the optimistic view is the proper view, we mark these favorable signs and are thankful. In this connection we can speak of the blessings of peace. "He hath blessed our nation with peace." The president mentions as one of the objects of thanksgiving the peace and order that have prevailed throughout the land. How different the condition of our beloved country when in 1864 the annual thanksgiving in the United States was established! A land then torn by internal dissension, reeking with the blood of the brave engaged in bloody warfare one against the other, is now harmonious and peaceful. The blue and the gray meet around their camp fires and in reunion and convention, recount their adventures without recalling the bitterness. The North rushes to the great exposition in the South and falls into the arms of a hospitable and generous people. They rejoice together as they view the proof of industrial progress and prosperity. They sit together at the board, they toast each other and praise the valor and virtue of the representatives of each State in the union as their governors come to be guests of the great State of Georgia. They listen together to representatives of the race which was the chief cause of the disastrous war, as with an eloquence which astonishes, and a modesty which challenges their admiration they tell of the progress and purpose of their hitherto benighted people. The Southern host conducts his Northern guest through the building where the evidence of their progress and thrift is exhibited; points to it with pride; acknowledges the justice of the verdict of war and looks without foreboding for a satisfactory and peaceful solution to this perplexing question, on which there has been in the past much honest difference of opinion. Thus North and South walk hand in hand—heart warmed toward heart. The past is forgotten—the future is glorious. The country is united and free! Let us on this blessed thanksgiving day, from the domes of Atlanta, look down upon this scene, and devoutly thank Almighty God for this wonderful progress in union and communion of all sections of our beloved land.

But to hasten to the conclusion of the consideration of our national blessings.

We can thank God for freedom from pestilence and from famine. Never d g n r s, e e e r Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The denominational shibboleth is no longer called for when Christians meet before the hand can be extended. But with the words "Is thy heart right with my heart? if so, give me thy hand," heart joins heart in loving fellowship and united labor. We have abundant reason, beloved, to be grateful for the manifestation of this unity which we have in this community today, especially between these sister churches which are here united in this act of worship, and which we have every reason to believe are united in a closer bond of love and fellowship than ever before. Let there be no strife between us. We be brethren: our interests are common; our faith is one; our Father is your Father. It was our Elder Brother who prayed for us when he said in that beautiful prayer in John xvii: "Neither pray for these alone, but for them also that shall believe on me through their word. That they may all be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they may also be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." The world is drawn to God by unity and love among his people, and repelled by the opposite. Let us continue to labor together in charity toward one another.

The effect of this spirit of fraternity, which, as we have said, is not local, is being manifest. Force and energy formerly spent in church polemics and strife concerning doctrine and dogma is now concentrated and directed against the common enemy, and great good is being accomplished thereby. Non-denominational conventions are convened, societies are formed, plans of suppressing vice and promoting virtue are discussed and adopted, and the great moral revolutions of the day are the results. Largely as the results of these union efforts are the excise laws of New York executed, the saloon closed on the Sabbath and the proposition made to reduce the number of her saloons one-half. Law and order is promulgated, vice is being driven before righteousness because the churches of God have profited by the example of the cohorts of sin, and united in efforts to suppress evil and exalt righteousness.

This is beautifully illustrated in this very community. One of the local causes for thanksgiving most prominent on this particular thanksgiving is the suppression of so much of the illicit liquor traffic in this community. This has been accomplished by men, who, regardless of political affiliation and church connection, have banded themselves together in a law and order society which has done so much to dethrone vice and exalt righteousness in our midst. Let us thank God for what has been done, and press shoulder to shoulder in additional exploits which are so much needed in this direction. In addition to so much accomplished in the direction of church unity and charity one toward another among God's people, great good has been accomplished in all lines of church work. We have not time to enter into statistics to prove this fact. Suffice it to say missions, foreign and domestic, report wonderous progress. Heathen nations are bowing, a nation in a day, before the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Reforms are successful beyond the fondest dreams of their projectors.

Philanthropic effort is put forth as never before. Hospitals and refuges for the needy; places for the reformation of the fallen are being organized and most liberally endowed and supported; educational institutions are being planned, perfected and endowed with millions. The church marches to victory! Practical piety is the piety of the hour. Lord what wilt Thou have me to do, and not what wilt Thou have me to believe, is the watchword of the christianity of this glorious age of triumph and achievement in the church of Christ. Let the church today thank God and take courage for—

"Zion enjoys her Monarch's love
Secure against a threatening hour
Nor can her firm foundations move
Built on His truth and armed with power."

Turn now to the last point of observation in causes for peace and thanksgiving to God: Personal blessings.

Perhaps as we come to consider such subjects on such days the first thought that occurs is in regard to the relation of the subject to us personally. What have I individually for which I should be thankful!

Well this is largely a matter for private consideration and silent, or at least secret thanksgiving. In the consideration of these obligations we would advise all to go into their closets and shut the door and let the substance of private devotions to-day be thanksgiving and praise for the innumerable blessings that have come to us in our private lives.

Let no man say I have no cause for thanksgiving. Let no Naomi say, call me not Naomi, but Mara for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. For even were we situated as Naomi. Even though death may have stalked through our halls and carried away treasures. Yet we have cause for thanksgiving that

"There is a world above
Where parting is unknown
And faith beholds the dying here
Transplanted to that happier sphere."

The darkest cloud has its silver lining and behind the cloud the sun is shining.

We heard of a poor, desolate old lady with scarcely the necessities of life, who when asked by her pastor, how she overcame the insomnia, of which she complained, remarked, "oh, I have no trouble, I just lay and count over the mercies of God until I fall asleep."

So every life has its numberless mercies. We have home and friends, comforts and joys, food and raiment, health and the use of the senses; these, and many kindred blessings are common to all.

Even the darkest, saddest life has its causes for thanksgiving. David thanked God for the discipline of affliction, saying, before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

We ought to be thankful that one wiser than we is our Shepherd and our guide. "He does not willingly afflict, or grieve the children of men" for naught.

We read years ago the story of a pious Rabbi which aptly illustrates the point. We have never forgotten the story or the moral.

This pious rabbi had been forced by heathen hatred to quit the boundary of his native land. He started into exile with all his possessions. His bible, the ass upon which he rode, and a faithful dog were his only companions on his journey. The first night he encamped he lighted his candle and commenced, as was his habit, to read the blessed word of God before retiring. Scarcely had he commenced when a gust of wind extinguished his light. He thought it strange but peacefully lay day down to sleep saying, God is good and means it for the best. In a little while a wild beast pounced upon and slew his faithful ass. His words were the same, "God is good and means it for the best." Late in the night a wolf fell upon and killed his faithful dog. Thus bereft of all, with no prospect for the morrow, he slept in peace, and in full confidence of the wisdom and goodness of God in this mysterious affliction. The next morning he arose and proceeded to a neighboring village, where he learned that a band of robbers and murderers passed by his camp the night before, and had robbed and murdered all along their path. Had they seen his light or been guided by the braying of his ass, or the barking of his dog, they would no doubt have been attracted to his camp and his life would have been sacrificed. Truly, said the pious saint, God is good and means all for the best.

So with all afflictive, Providences in the lives of God's servants. Some of you have been afflicted, and afflcted grievously. You may have said, like Jacob of old, "Joseph is not and Simeon is not, all these things are against me." Remember Jacob afterwards learned that the things which he had said were against him were the provisions of God for the preservation in his life and the lives of his house-hold.

So, although your hearts may be bleeding over the spoils that death has won, be trustful. God has taken away the desire of your heart, perhaps, to lure you to your heavenly heritage. To make you home-sick for Heaven, tired of earth and sorrow, anxious for a life and place where death is unknown, and parting and pain can never come.

So with all afflictions, which sometimes inclines us to be rebellious and complaining, rather than submissive and thankful. In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, concerning you. So do. Be glad that God has a will concerning you.

Above all things let every Christian today have the greatest gift of God before his eyes, before his thought, within his heart. Say above all things, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. "Survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died, see from his head, his hands, his heart sorrow and love flow mingled down" and rememeber that love so amazing, so divine demands the soul, the life, the all. It behooves us today to offer a sacrifice of Thanksgiving unto the Lord and to offer it of our own free will." May every soul say: What shall I render unto the Lord for his benefit? I hear Paul say I bessech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God present your bodies a living sacrifice wholly and acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service. Therefore let every soul say "here Lord I give myself away, tis all that I can do." I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people; I will offer to Him the sacrifice of Thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord. In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalam, Praiseye the Lord. In the laudable desire to show gratitude to God let us remember the closing words of the President's proclamation: "And let us also on the day of our Thanksgiving, especially remember the poor and needy, and by deeds of charity let us show the sincerity of our gratitude. David in a moment of gratitude, as he remembered the love of Jonathan his benefactor and his dearest friend cried out "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake Oh beloved as we remember, the friend that sticketh closer than a brother, by whose stripes we are healed. As we sit beneath his cross and say did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown. Is there any of God's house that we may show him kindness for Jesus sake?

We answer, yes, there is many a Miphibosheth that is lame in his feet not able to help himself and our Lord has said in as much as ye do it to the least of them, ye do it unto me. May such deeds of practical gratitude characterize all our future lives. We have not exhausted the sources of gratitude, but have written sufficient to more than occupy the time allotted for the sermon. Midnight approaches we are reminded the Psalmist's words "at midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee." Well may the thought of God's goodness prevent our slumber in the midnight watches. We are glad this day is appointed, although our Saviour might reproachfully say, as in the days of his flesh, were there not ten cleansed, where are the nine? Have not the whole community shared my blessing and received my merciful protection? Where are the ones not in the house of God? Yet a goodly number are here to render thanks unto God.

"Oh, make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye people. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise; be thankful unto Him and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting and His truth endureth to all generations."

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