

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Thanksgiving
November 27, 2025
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
Grace and goodness beyond measure!

—Deuteronomy 8:10-18

No other country in the world celebrates Thanksgiving quite the way we do in these United States of America. Granted, there are harvest festivals around the world, in which countries and cultures celebrate the gathering of the harvest in fall. The practice of giving thanks at the harvest actually goes all the way back to the days of Moses in the Bible, when the Israelites celebrated *Sukkot*, the Feast of Tabernacles. We all learned the history of the Pilgrims, who celebrated the first Thanksgiving in America, but the national holiday of Thanksgiving in the United States was established in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln, who issued a proclamation that the last Thursday in November should be set aside as a National Day of Thanksgiving.

So how would you describe the American tradition of Thanksgiving to a friend from a foreign country who has never experienced it? Better yet, if you were to distill all of Thanksgiving down to a single word, what would it be? Gratitude? (That has the same meaning as “Thanksgiving.”) Food? Family? Friends? Fun? Football? I’m going to suggest the word *feast*. “Feast” can mean more than just food. “Feast” means the abundance of *everything* we celebrate at Thanksgiving, as we are blessed with grace and goodness beyond measure!

There should be no question how blessed we are. Many of you have been to some of the poorer parts of the world, as have I, and maybe that’s something that helps us appreciate so much the material blessings we enjoy in the United States. We might complain about inflation and the high cost of living, and we might wring our hands about the problems our country and society face, but—Wow!—are you and I ever blessed!

So pull up a chair, take a seat at the table, and give thanks for the feast that’s spread before us. It’s all a gift from God. Everything you have came from your heavenly Father. God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. He doesn’t do it because we have earned his favor or deserved his goodness. He does it because he is your Creator, because he is kind and merciful, because he loves you. God created you and gave you your body and soul, your eyes, ears, and all your members, your mind and all your abilities. We say with the psalmist, “I will praise you, O LORD, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made!” (Psalm 139:14). Are you smart? Do you have great intellectual ability? Praise God; it came from him! Are you talented in sports or music? Praise God; it came from him! Are you strong? Do you have great physical strength? Praise God; it came from him! Do you have good health? Praise God; it came from him! God not only created us; he still preserves us by richly and daily providing us with clothing and shoes, house and home, spouse, children, land cattle, and all our goods, and all we need to keep our bodies and lives. It’s all from him!

But now listen again to what Moses tells the Israelites in Deuteronomy: ¹⁰ *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.* ¹¹ *Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.* ¹⁷ *You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”* ¹⁸ *But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.* There’s a certain irony here. You would think that the more material blessings we enjoy, the more we would just want to fall on our knees and thank the Giver of all that is good. But, in fact, exactly the opposite can happen. The more material things we enjoy, the easier it is to forget God. So don’t be proud; be thankful to God. Don’t pat yourself on the back; give glory to God. Don’t trust in all the stuff; trust the one who has generously given you your stuff, and use your stuff to honor him.

But the comfortable house you enjoy—that’s just the beginning. The nice car, the fun vacations, the backyard pool, health and strength, family and friends—these are just appetizers for the feast. The good food—I mean the *really* good food!—is way better. That’s because God not only has given you everything you need for your body. He has given you everything you need for your soul. What would Thanksgiving be without our Savior Jesus Christ? Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father, came from heaven full of grace and truth. He stood squarely under the divine law—the Commandments we have broken—and he fulfilled it as our Substitute. He died our death on the cross to forgive us our sins, and he rose again from the dead to declare victory over Satan. Because of Jesus, your sins have been taken away, your transgressions removed as far as the east is from the west. Now, repenting and trusting in Jesus, your sins are forgiven. “He was delivered over to death for our sins; he was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25). “Justification” means declared “non-guilty” in God’s courtroom. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

You want a good reason to be thankful this season? Give thanks because you’re going to heaven! You’re going to heaven because Jesus already suffered your hell on the cross. Now you live life with hope and confidence that you’re going to be with the Lord in heaven. You’re a child of God, a member of God’s family. You’re part of Christ’s body, his

Church. You have been baptized into Christ, washed with water in the name of God, and adopted into God's holy household. You can get up every day and live life confidently, without fear, because trusting in Jesus you face each day in the confidence and strength of God your Savior. God has given you his Holy Spirit and made your body the holy temple where he lives. You're holy in God's sight because of what Jesus did for you on the cross to cleanse you from all sin, and now you can live a holy life, a life of thanksgiving and praise—not just with the words that come from your lips and the songs that flow from your hearts, but with your whole life that is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God. Give thanks for the privilege of making decisions that honor God. Give thanks for the privilege of using your wealth to honor God. Give thanks for the opportunities to serve God by serving your neighbor. Give thanks for the opportunities he gives you to show love and kindness to others, a cup of cold water in Jesus' name, toys for underprivileged children, a word of encouragement to a hurting coworker shared in the name of Jesus. Give thanks for it all, because you have been justified in Christ, and you have been sanctified by the Spirit of God. You have been given the highest calling known to mankind: You are called a Christian, a follower of Jesus, a blessed heir of eternal life. This Thanksgiving, give thanks with your whole being, because it doesn't get any better than that!

Even when it hurts, give thanks. Even when the feast is bitter. Life isn't always wine and roses. Difficult times come our way, but those difficult times don't take away from who we are as Christians. So give thanks for the pain and the sorrows. When life is tough, give thanks that God has chosen you to refine you in the crucible of testing. When your body hurts, give thanks for God's strength to bear up under suffering, and give thanks for the confidence that he will never leave you or forsake you. When you suffer loss, when a loved one is gone, when tragedy or disaster strikes, when all the pain in your life seems too hard to bear, give thanks that God has blessed you with the struggle. Don't despair. Your struggle will cease, your pain will pass, your suffering will end, and you will be stronger and closer to your Lord Jesus because of it. And when the Lord takes you to heaven and gives you rest from your labors, your heavenly rest will be all the sweeter for the pain you have endured here.

Give thanks without envy and without bitterness. It's easy to look at someone else's life and wish we had what they had, to wish our life was easier or different. Politicians want to decry the billionaires and the corporations. Just stop. Get rid of all envy, stop worrying about what other people have, and just celebrate and give thanks what God has given to *you*. If you're a billionaire or a millionaire or a thousandaire or even if your net worth is negative, just give thanks for the blessings God has given *you* to manage. If you are healthy and strong or you are battling illness, God has placed you exactly where he wants you at this point in time. He has poured out special blessings into your life, blessings reserved just for you and nobody else. Cherish them! Give thanks for them! God has showered you with grace and goodness beyond measure. In Jesus you have all the blessings you need, now and forever.

Enjoy the feast! A blessed Thanksgiving to you, and may your Thanksgiving never end! Amen.