

A few verses from Psalm 135:

*Despite the depressing condition of our world and the distortions of our society;  
or even the problems and conflicts of our lives, let us take time to praise the Lord.*

*When you feel you are forgotten, your loving God never forgets.*

*When you are tired and lonely, your great God will never leave your side.*

*Let us praise the Lord!*

*He makes our lives and our living, every hour and every day, truly worthwhile;  
and we belong to Him forever.*

*Let us praise the Lord! - By Leslie Brandt*

These verses echo the sentiments of a lot of people as they review the unusualness of the past months for themselves, for their families, for the nation and for the world. And, most of us would join with them. Our feelings have been all over the charts, and probably our faith as well. But in spite of the unusualness of the times we remember **“Thou art the same, Thy years shall have no end.”**

As we look back on history and the history of our lives we must note that God's hand has been there in very unique and special ways, transforming harsh and difficult times, protecting and caring during difficult times, enabling and comforting during stressful times, and always surrounding us with forgiveness through His mercy and grace. What we thought was only bad, somehow He has made it and us better. When we thought we were overwhelmed He gave us wisdom and strength to overcome. When we were lost suddenly we found we were being carried in safety. When we thought life was hell He gave us a vision of heaven and filled our hearts with joy and peace in our believing. When everything was unsettled, we found we could settle in His loving arms.

Many will only be focusing on things to give thanks for this Thanksgiving, but as the people of God we will expand and mainly focus on how God has been “in” our lives and how God has rescued, redeemed and restored us through the gift of His Son and how we know we shall pass through this life to that which is eternal in heaven.

So, no matter the conditions in our world, no matter the problems and pains in our lives, no matter how we feel, let us rejoice and praise God that He has claimed us as His own in time and for all eternity. Always we will be in His family. Always He will be our Father. Always we will be His children. Let us give thanks and praise the Lord.

((As the Covid 19 crisis continues I will do what I am able to continue with visitation in person or by letter. Let us rejoice and be glad that we are always together in the Lord.))

Peace and blessings, Pastor Lemke

During Thanksgiving we have often sung the hymn:

*“Give Thanks with A Grateful Heart, Give thanks to the Holy One.  
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ His Son.....  
And now let the weak say 'I am strong,' Let the poor say 'I am rich.’”  
Because of what the Lord has done for us. Give thanks.”*

As the words are coupled with the beautiful melody we can hardly help but have thankful hearts. And we do, even through this pandemic, even through the political turmoil, even through personal changes and crises in our lives.

Following Thanksgiving the church year comes to an end with reminders to always be ready and sets the scene for Advent when we review and reflect on how God prepared and delivered His son for forgiveness, life and salvation. We are assured that God keeps His promises for time and for eternity. So we celebrate in the present the great love of God for us in an often very dark world. We celebrate the hope we have in Christ for the dawning of each new day. And we rest in the loving arms of our Savior.

The Covid crisis has interfered with life in many ways causing curtailments and adjustments, creating crises and fears, but helping us to “call on the name of the Lord” with additional confidence and courage. “The Lord is my helper, of whom (or what) shall I be afraid.” - My ministry was curtailed again in November because we had Covid in our home (our son) and were quarantined for two weeks; then the pandemic started taking a broader toll . So I will continue writing these devotional letters to you.

I would like to close with a prayer from the 1950 edition of THE LUTHERAN BOOK OF PRAYER which Melba and I have found very contemporary:

*O God, You made man in Your own likeness, and You love what You have made. Give to those whom You have placed in the seats of honor and power a sense of awe and humility before You as their Creator and Lord. Help them to see the unity of the human family and to promote it. Enable them to feel the suffering of humankind and to alleviate it. Encourage them to pursue the truth of human history and to learn from it. Give to them the blessing of sound judgment, the skill of making wise decisions, the patience to act in due time, and the tact for being mutually helpful. - Make the conference table a weapon for keeping peace. Use the councils of leaders as the means to counsel for the good of all people. Help the counselors resolve their differences always in the interest of justice among the people they serve. Keep them from national or racial pride that would jeopardize the safety of any nation. Make them the servants to serve Your will, that they may also serve those for whom Your Son has died. Amen.*

Blessings and courage to you during this advent season, Pastor Lemke