

November 2016 –

Beloved Neighbors in Christ,

If you have not noticed, the days are getting shorter and the temperatures are getting cooler. November is now upon us and with that comes one of my favorite secular holidays. The trees will soon be bare from their leaves and the smells of warm cider and cinnamon will linger in our homes and places we congregate to meet family and friend. We will come together to celebrate the Day of Thanksgiving with turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, pumpkin pie, and leftovers for days. We will gather at the table and raise up to God the things in our lives that matter most. I surely have so much to be thankful for this year: my call as pastor to Neighbors in Christ, good health, a roof over my head, a wonderful spouse and partner to continue along with me through life, and a girl and boy on the way. And I thank God daily for what I have been given as a live a life of Thanksgiving to the Lord.

For God's people, Thanksgiving is far more than just a special day located on the calendar. The Holy Bible urges us to live a life of thanksgiving each day of our lives – in the good days, and the bad. Being thankful to God for all the blessings we have been given is truly a mark of the Christian lives we are called to lead. I want to offer your four ways that you may express your thanksgiving to the Lord this year. The basis for this message comes from Psalm 100 that was written as a song of praise to God as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

Do not be afraid to shout praises to the Lord, either. Psalm 100:1 reads "Make a joyful shout to the Lord!" Biblically, shouting was associated with great achievements and absolute joy. Joshua told the people Israel to march around the city of Jericho for six days and on the seventh to lift a great shout. When they finally did, the walls came tumbling down. God loves to hear our praises! Additionally, do not be afraid to serve the Lord with a happy and cheerful heart. Psalm 100:2 tells us to "Serve the Lord with gladness." You have heard to turn your frown upside down – well my friends, God loves it when we have smiles on our faces and enjoy what we are doing.

Our Lord also calls us to come into God's presence and to not be afraid while we are doing so. Psalm 100:2 reminds us to "Come before God with singing" and praise. In the morning, and the afternoon, and in the evening, we are called to pray and give thanks to our God, and when we do, God hears what we have to say. This practice comes from the early Church when they met regularly to hear God's Word, come together in fellowship, and worship and praise the Almighty. And do not be afraid to get to know the Lord and have your own personal relationship with God. Psalm 100:3 tells us to "know that the Lord is God; it is the Lord who has made us, and not ourselves. We are God's people and the sheep of God's pasture." We are God's and all that we have comes from the Lord – this is such warm and comforting news to hear, and I am thankful because of it.

This Thanksgiving, let us be grateful as we praise and worship our Triune God this holiday season! Please join me on Wednesday November 23rd at 7 pm for a combined Neighbors in Christ worship service at First Lutheran Church in Winthrop. Let us give thanks and praise to the One who gives us all.

From my family to yours, have a blessed Day of Thanksgiving!

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ