OH, THANK GOD

❖ Opening remarks.
  ➢ How many times have you heard or even said the title of the sermon as a statement of relief?
  ➢ Today we celebrate Thanksgiving as a congregation.
  ➢ What does that mean to us?

❖ History of Thanksgiving
  ➢ What do you know about the origins of Thanksgiving?
  ➢ Most of us probably point back to the gathering of the Pilgrims with the Indians around them in 1621.
    ▪ This is not far from the truth in terms of our national holiday.
    ▪ However, there were plenty of other thanksgiving celebrations prior to the Pilgrims in what are now the states of Virginia and Florida.
  ➢ There have been many times throughout our history that calls for thanksgiving were made, but it is at Plymouth Plantation that is was called for by the civil authorities rather than the church for the first time.
    ▪ That fact is what leads to the discussion of this being the predecessor of our modern day Thanksgiving.
  ➢ Time after time, leaders and the congress have called for days of thanksgiving.
    ▪ During the Revolutionary War, congress called for days of thanksgiving and prayer at least twice a year.
    ▪ It is President George Washington who calls for the first national celebration on the final Thursday of November in 1789.
      • His decision to mark that day is followed by many of those who follow him.
      • However, it was still up to the states to set up their celebrations, including the dates.
      • The dates were still arbitrary even among the Presidents.
        ♦ Some proclaimed dates that were not in the autumn months.
    ▪ President Lincoln would call for a day of thanksgiving on the last Thursday of November during the middle of the Civil war in 1863.
    ▪ The Presidents following Lincoln all followed his lead by proclaiming the last Thursday as the day of Thanksgiving.
      • In 1939, FDR broke with tradition.
        ♦ That was a year in which there were five Thursdays, and he scheduled it for the fourth one.
        ♦ Because of the conflict it caused, the date got moved around for the next couple years, and not everyone agreed to celebrate it on that day.
OH, THANK GOD

- December 1941, Congress and the Senate passed a bill making it a matter of federal law that Thanksgiving Day would be celebrated as a federal holiday on the fourth Thursday of November.

❖ Precedence

➢ All of this seems to stem from what happened with the Pilgrims as they celebrated a bountiful harvest after a great disaster the preceding year where over half of them died under great hardship.
  ▪ This is not something we are unfamiliar with when we think of giving thanks.
  ▪ Much of the history we know shows us celebrations of people grateful for the food or harvest that they have received.

➢ Early biblical record.
  ▪ We have an early record of national days of thanksgiving being established.
  - In Leviticus 23, we see that God added into the Law, among the other feasts that Israel was to celebrate, the Feast of Weeks.
  - This feast was particularly set into effect in order to celebrate the harvest every year so that God would get the honor for the bounty that Israel received.
  ▪ Why would God establish this festival?
    - I think there are two answers to that.
      ♦ The first is to remind Israel who really provided their abundance.
        ➢ It is so easy for us, in our fallen humanity, to take the credit for the work we have done, assuming it was done in our own strength.
      ♦ The second is because God know that we really have trouble remembering to thank Him for what He has done.
        ➢ We are teaching Beckett manners.
          ▪ Children do not come by good manners naturally.
          ▪ We have to repeatedly remind them to say “thank you.”
        ➢ God has found that, as His children, we are no different.
          ▪ We will not be thankful people if we are not reminded that we need to be.

❖ Today’s passage

➢ Zachariah had to learn thankfulness and trust the hard way.
  ▪ When God told him that he and Elizabeth would be a part of preparing the way for the advent of the Savior.
  ▪ In his doubt, he had been silenced so he could learn to hear what God was really saying.
  ▪ When it came time to have his tongue loosed, his first response was to spend time thanking God for His faithfulness to His people.
OH, THANK GOD

➤ You would think that Zachariah would want to give praise for his newborn son, but what we see is something quite different.
  ▪ While Zachariah does speak to and of his son at the end of the psalm, his focus is on the coming Messiah.
  ▪ In the months of silence, Zachariah has come to understand what he was told.
    • The Messiah is coming.
    • His child is the prophet coming before.
    • God is faithful.
    • God keeps His promises.
    • God is gracious.
    • God is merciful.

❖ Conclusion
  ➤ How grateful are we?
  ➤ Did God have a national day of Thanksgiving established here so that we would also be reminded who deserves the praise?
  ➤ God has been merciful to us.
    ▪ We live in a land of freedom and of plenty.
    ▪ He has provided a beautiful worship space for us.
    ▪ He sent His Son to die in our place so that we may enter into His presence.
    ▪ He raised His Son from the dead so that we may be in His presence for all eternity.
    ▪ He has forgiven our sins.
  ➤ Come, Ye Thankful People, Come!
    ▪ Live lives full of thanksgiving and praise everyday of your lives now and into eternity!

❖ Closing Prayer.
  ➤ Father, thank you for loving us so much. Thank you for all You give us. For each day, each breath, each heartbeat, we give You thanks. Prompt us to be Your thankful people everyday and not just one day of the year. Thank you, in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Rev. Scott Shetter, The Church of the Covenant, November 24, 2019