

Genesis 8:20-22 *Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. ²¹The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. ²²"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Some years ago, Charles Schulz pictured Charlie Brown bringing out Snoopy's dinner on Thanksgiving Day. To Snoopy's dismay it was just his usual dog food in a bowl. Snoopy took one look at the dog food and said, "This isn't fair. The rest of the world today is eating turkey with all the trimmings and all I get is dog food. Why? Because I'm a dog, so all I get is dog food?" He stood there and stared at his dog food as he thought for a moment. Then he said, "I guess it could be worse. I could be a turkey."

Are we guilty of this? It's easy to look at everything around us and focus on what we don't have rather than on what we do have. It's easy to look at the negatives we have to face and get caught up and lost in the challenges around us. This can leave us feeling resentful rather than thankful. Certainly, if we look around us we can find plenty to be negative about. The Christmas ads are already running that do a great job of reminding us of all those things we don't have. Sickesses or physical challenges may be plaguing you or family members which are seemingly too big to overcome. You might be facing relationship problems with your spouse or children, problems at work or with your house, or any number of other issues which might lead you to find little reason to give thanks and give you every reason to focus on the negatives.

But we are not alone. Giving thanks despite the terrible circumstances around you is something that people have been doing for a long time. Consider the Pilgrims who sat down to celebrate the first Thanksgiving in 1621. They had uprooted themselves and sailed for America. This endeavor was so hazardous that published guides advised travelers to the New World, "First, make thy will." The crossing was very rough and the Mayflower was blown off course. Instead of reaching Virginia, where Englishmen had settled 13 years earlier, they ended up in the wilds of Massachusetts. By the time they found a place to make their home, winter had set in. The storms were frightful. Shelter was rudimentary. There was little food. The promise of making your own life was enticing, but the reality was much different. Within weeks, nearly all the settlers were sick. Within two or three month's time half of their company had died. What had started as an adventure with the promise of new life had turned into a nightmare. In spring, the Indians showed them how to plant corn, but their first crops were dismal. Their supplies ran out and their sponsors in London refused to resupply them. They would have had every reason to be resentful and bitter and focus on the negatives. Yet they still sat down to celebrate God's blessings and goodness and give thanks to God for what they did have despite the challenges they faced.

We think about Abraham Lincoln, who had the difficult job of leading the United States through the Civil War. On Oct. 3, 1863 as the war between the states raged, Lincoln was weary with his responsibility. Yet despite that he was able to write, "The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the Source from which they came...others may be added." Even amidst extreme challenges, he was able to step back and recognize the blessings of God.

The same was true for Noah. We are told in our text how Noah built an altar to the Lord and offered a thank offering when he came out of the ark. We can understand Noah's thankfulness at being spared from the flood, but think about the situation Noah was in. Everything had been destroyed. It wasn't like he could step off the ark and head back to his home and pick up life where he had left if off a year earlier. It had all been destroyed. There wasn't any home to go back to. There was literally nothing. Sure, the earth had begun to rejuvenate itself, but Noah and his family had to start over from scratch in building their homes and settling the land. In addition, everything that needed to be done was going to have to be done by him and his sons. There were no other people around to help and there wouldn't be for some time. It was going to take quite a long time until the children of his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, would have would be old enough and strong enough to help. God had saved him and his family, to be sure. But the road ahead was anything but smooth. There was a lot of work to do and they were the only ones to do it.

The same was true when it came to food. They couldn't just step off the ark and head to the nearest grocery store to pick up what they needed for supper that night. The food too had been destroyed. Crops, gardens, fruit trees, vegetables, everything—it had all been destroyed. This flood had caused total devastation. We see how the fires in California destroyed everything in their path, yet even these fires pale in comparison to what Noah faced when he came off the ark. The entire world looked like that. What food they had to eat they had brought with them on the ark. After a year of floating on the water, no doubt their supplies had been greatly depleted. Yes, God had given them meat to eat but they had to be careful, after the offering they gave they needed to keep enough around to mate and produce more animals to eat. The animals they had with them on the ark were the only animals there were. They needed to manage them in a way that they had food to eat while making sure they could reproduce and provide food in the future.

I think all of this gives us a different perspective on the attitude of Noah and the offering which he gave when he came off the ark. Despite the circumstances Noah and his family faced, the first thing Noah did when he stepped off the ark was give thanks to God and worship him. Noah's thankful actions came from a heart that was totally dedicated to the Lord. He recognized his total and complete dependence on God. He knew that everything he had was a gift from God and recognized that by worshipping Him in thanksgiving. He built an altar to God and offered burnt offerings on it. Just ponder for a moment what a sacrifice this was. There were only a limited number of animals left on this earth—only what was left on the ark. Most likely he offered the 7th of the animals so that they others could mate and reproduce. He offered God 1/7 or 14% of what he had! He did this knowing that he had a limited amount of food for him and his family to eat. This was perhaps the most liberal, generous, and trusting offering ever made.

But the offering Noah gave shows us where his heart was at. He gave a burnt offering to the Lord. The burned offering was the only one where the entire animal was burned completely. It was an offering that symbolized the worshipper's complete dedication to the Lord. Noah didn't focus on the negatives around him and what he didn't have. Noah focused on the blessings God had given to him and by offering this in worship to the Lord, Noah was telling God that he was completely dedicated to the true and faithful Lord as his only hope. Noah had experienced the faithfulness of God. Imagine the gratitude Noah had in seeing the devastation and total destruction of the world and knowing that God in grace had saved him and his family from this universal catastrophe. Imagine hearing the screams of the people as they pounded on the outside of the ark knowing there was nothing you could do to save them, but God had been gracious enough to save you. Imagine wondering how you would ever have enough to eat and take care of yourself and your family as you floated for a year on the water with no land in sight and no certainty in the future. Noah worshipped God thankful that God had protected and saved him. He noted his unworthiness at God's great blessing and his response was to praise and thank him and dedicate himself completely to the Lord. Most importantly, he worshipped God that he had been faithful to his promise to keep alive the line of the Savior through which he had promised to rescue humankind from their sin. He worshipped God for his faithfulness despite the challenges around him.

So we gather tonight in thanksgiving to our God. Despite what challenges or negatives you might be facing in life, we gather tonight as recipients of God's promises to Noah. As Noah and his family worshipped God in thanksgiving, God made some tremendous promises. God promised mercy. The flood had been sent as a curse against the sinfulness of mankind. God promised that he would never again send a flood to destroy the earth as he had just done. God promised faithfulness and patience in dealing with human sin even though he recognized that every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. What grace God displayed in keeping alive the family line of the Savior and then in sending the Savior Jesus as he had promised. What grace of God to be patient and give humankind a time of grace to come to faith and know Jesus as their Savior and the salvation which he brings. But God didn't stop his promises there. He promised that he would continue to take care of humankind and provide for their needs. The times and seasons of the earth are not just natural variations. They are the outgrowth of God's promises. Seedtime and harvest speak to God providing food for his people. Cold and heat, winter and summer go right along with that. Day and night speak also to the rest which the body needs. God promised that everything between the wide limits of food and sleep and everything that makes both possible are fixed by divine ordinances and used by God to be a blessing to us.

When you think about all of this and step back to count all the blessings which God has brought to us, we stand in humble awe. Especially when we recognize that when God described the sinful nature as every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood he was describing us, to know that he would bless us anyway is amazing. Of course, we recognize the greatest blessing which God gives to us is the rescue from our sin. There is a picture in this account which applies to us: as God rescued Noah and his family from the wickedness of the world through the flood, so he rescued us from the consequences of our sin through the blood which Jesus shed on the cross. It was the Apostle Peter who made the connection between the waters of the flood which wiped the wickedness away from the earth and the waters of baptism which wiped the sin from our hearts. Though God would be completely just to wipe us off this earth completely because of our sin, he has seen fit to rescue us through Jesus and bless us tremendously. He has filled our cornucopia to the full and then some, overflowing with blessings beyond imagination. We gather this evening to offer our worship of thanksgiving with hearts completely dedicated to the Lord in thanks for all that he has done for us.

God's goodness to us in all the blessings which has given us calls for us to respond by fully dedicating ourselves to our God. What will your response be? Noah brought an offering before the Lord which displayed his total dedication to the Him. Do the offerings that you bring display the same? Do you bring before the Lord the best and first of what you have in offering, trusting as Noah that he will take care of you despite the challenging times before you? As you give thanks, dedicate yourselves fully to the Lord in all things trusting in his promises that he will always provide for the needs of his people.

God has indeed been good to us. That doesn't mean that everything will be easy for us. We will still have to work hard to receive these blessings from God. There will still be trouble and difficulty which we will experience as we go forward in life. But we go forward with our trust fully in the promises of God. With whatever you have or don't have, recognize the blessing of God in your life and give thanks. Though you certainly can find plenty to be negative about, let your heart overflow with thanksgiving as you count the blessings of God. As you worship him, let your response be that of Noah—to fully dedicate yourself to the Lord in all things. Amen.