

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Psalm 95:1-7a

In his book FOLK PSALMS OF FAITH, Ray Stedman tells of an experience H.A. Ironside had in a crowded restaurant. Ironside was a Canadian American Bible teacher, preacher, theologian, pastor, and author. On that day, Stedman tells us, just as Ironside was about to begin his meal, a man approached and asked if he could join him. Ironside invited him to have a seat. Then, as was his custom, Ironside bowed his head in prayer. When he opened his eyes, the other man asked, "Do you have a headache?" Ironside replied, "No, I don't." The other man asked, "Well, is there something wrong with your food?" Ironside replied, "No, I was simply thanking God as I always do before I eat."

The man said, "Oh, you're one of those, are you? Well, I want you to know I never give thanks. I earn my money by the sweat of my brow and I don't have to give thanks to anybody when I eat. I just start right in!"

Ironside said, "Yes, you're just like my dog. That's what he does too!"

Here we are, once again, a few days before Thanksgiving Day, and we are encouraged to think about the things we are thankful for and to offer God our gratitude for providing these things. And every year at this time, my message to those in church is that we should be thankful every day, not just on Thanksgiving Day.

This morning, our scripture reading was from Psalm 95:1-7a. We are going to use the words of this Psalm to help us reflect on everyday thankfulness.

This Psalm is an invitation to us to come before God with thankful hearts; and we are encouraged to express our gratitude through praise. The writer of this psalm invites us to thankful worship, to sing and shout, to kneel before the One to whom we owe our gratitude. The Psalmist points out three good reasons we should worship our God with thankfulness and praise.

With thankful hearts we praise God because God is the Rock of our salvation. The name Rock refers to the fact that God is the foundation of everything. He alone is immovable and unbreakable. When building a house, it is important to dig down to the rock to form a strong foundation so that over time the ground beneath the house won't begin to crumble and tear the house apart. God is the foundation for our lives that will not crumble. In God there is no need to fear because He will not crumble, and as long as we trust in Him neither will we.

The first American Thanksgiving didn't occur in 1621 when a group of Pilgrims shared a feast with a group of friendly Indians. The first recorded thanksgiving took place in Virginia more than 11 years earlier, and it wasn't a feast. The winter of 1610 at Jamestown had reduced a group of 409 settlers to 60. The survivors prayed for help, without knowing when or how it might come. When help arrived, in the form of a ship filled with food and supplies from England, a prayer meeting was held to give thanks to God.

A man has been lost and walking in the desert for about five days. One hot day--actually, they're all hot--he comes to the home of a preacher. Tired and weak, he crawls up to the house and collapses on the doorstep. The preacher takes him in and nurses him back to health. Feeling better, the man asks the preacher for directions to the nearest town. The preacher tells him the directions and offers to lend him his horse to make it. The preacher says, "However, there is a special thing about this horse. You have to say 'Thank God' to make it go and 'Amen' to make it stop."

Anxious to get to town, the man says, "Sure, okay" and gets on the horse. He says, "Thank God" and sho 'nuff, the horse starts walking. A bit later he says louder, "Thank God,

thank God," and the horse starts trotting. Feeling really brave, the man says, "Thank God! Thank God! THANK GOD!" and the horse is soon up to a full run!

About then he realizes he's heading for a huge cliff and yells "Whoa!" But the horse doesn't even slow! It's coming up REAL QUICK and he's doing everything he can to make the horse stop. "Whoa, stop, hold on!" Finally, he remembers "AMEN!!!"

The horse stops a mere two inches from the cliff's edge, almost throwing him over its head. The man, panting and heart racing, wipes the sweat from his face and leans back in the saddle. "Oh!" he says, gasping for air, "Thank God."

It would do us good to never take God for granted. God is the Rock of our salvation. The Psalmist also points out that with thankful hearts we praise God because God is Creator of all, and all belongs to God. Without God, our world and all that dwells on it, our universe as we know it would be non-existent. You and I would not exist. The seasons would not exist. The food we eat would not exist.

Not only should we remember that God is Creator of all, but we need to remember also that everything belongs to God. Humanity has been given the responsibility to be good stewards of all that God creates. It is a blessing, it is a privilege, that God would give us this responsibility; but we need to remember that we are not the creators of all things. God is, and for this we should thank God.

There was a man who went on a vacation with his wife and took along a camera. Upon their return, his wife began proudly showed off their latest set of vacation photos; she'd then tell her husband her coworkers' reactions. After a few days of this, her husband noticed a recurring theme. Invariably, people would say, "Wow, your husband must have a really nice camera!"

Even though people liked his photos, he was disappointed. He wanted them to acknowledge what a good photographer he was, not what a good camera he had.

He ranted to his wife: "Why do people do this? Nobody looks at a painting and says, 'Nice brushes!' Nobody looks at a skyscraper and says, 'Nice drafting table!' Nobody looks at a sculpture and says, 'Nice chisel!' What's wrong with these people?"

It felt good to get that off his chest. Until his wife reminded him, "So how often do you look at creation and say, 'Nice work, God?'"

With thankful hearts, we praise God because God is the Rock of our salvation, God is creator of all, and because God is God, and we are God's sheep. There is no other true God. God is greater than anything we could ever imagine. God can do and have anything he wants, and yet God chooses you and me. We are God's sheep and God is our great Shepherd watching over us, protecting us, saving us. It just blows my mind to think about this amazing and awesome God caring about me soooo much, even when I wander from him.

Dr. Andrew Bonar, a minister of the Free Church of Scotland, tells us that in the Highlands of Scotland, a sheep would often wander off into the rocks and get into places that they couldn't get out of. The grass on these mountains is very sweet and the sheep like it, and they will jump down ten or twelve feet, and then they can't jump back again, and the shepherd hears them bleating in distress. They may be there for days until they have eaten all the grass.

The shepherd will wait until they are so faint they cannot stand, and then they will put a rope around him, and he will go over and pull that sheep up out of the jaws of death. "Why don't they go down there when the sheep first gets there?" I asked. "Ah!" He said, "they are so very foolish they would dash right over the precipice and be killed if they did!" And that is the way with people; they won't go back to God till they have no friends and have lost everything. But

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God, well, God is always nearby, ready to rescue us from ourselves, if we let him. God loves us more than our minds can comprehend, and God will never abandon us.

The Psalmist sings, “Let us come before God with thanksgiving.” He didn’t have Thanksgiving Day, so he surely is telling us to give God our thanks every day. Therefore, with thankful hearts we praise God because he is the Rock of our salvation, and because God is creator of all, and because God is God, and we are God’s sheep. My friends, may we give our heart-felt thanks to God, every day and not just on Thanksgiving. Amen.