

November 25, 2012
Thanksgiving 2012

Enter His Gates

Opening words:

Our primary text for this morning comes from the Old Testament. To be more exact it comes from part of the wisdom literature, Psalms. Originally, a psalm was a piece of poetry that was sung to a stringed instrument. There are one hundred and fifty of these songs organized in five books. Our song for today comes from the fourth book. Psalm 100 is a song of praise or thanksgiving. Many believe it was sung while an offering was given. May God give you ears to hear. Let me call this Thanksgiving message *Enter His Gates*.

Psalm 100

1 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
2 Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
3 Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Did you know Thanksgiving did not become a national holiday until 1941? However, Americans have been observing a day of thanksgiving for generations. Historians tell us the first recorded thanksgiving took place in Jamestown, Virginia. The winter of 1610 was harsh at Jamestown and many settlers died. This is the fact. The group that originally totaled 409 was reduced to 60. Those 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. There is no mention of a feast, only worship. Maybe that is why it is not the famous Thanksgiving?

The Thanksgiving we are familiar with happened in 1621. You know the story. The Pilgrims left Southampton, England in 1620. They desired religious freedom so they headed for North America. They had troubles from the start. As they sailed around the south tip of the British Isles one of their ships, the *Speedway*, was ruled not seaworthy. The two ships stopped and some of the Pilgrims went home. However, some of the *Speedway's* passengers boarded the second ship, the *Mayflower*. Due to the weight of the extra passengers the trip took longer than the estimated 66 days. They wanted to go to Virginia, but when they finally arrived they were in Massachusetts. It was November and the weather was growing harsh. There was no time to build permanent shelters so they survived that first winter in this new world in crude temporary housing. In time, disease came and the death toll began to rise. Only 51 of the original 102 saw the spring.

The dead were buried in unmarked graves so the local natives would not know how small their numbers had grown. When the spring came they were forced to make a painful choice. The Mayflower was a rented ship and had to return to England. Would they stay in North America to face an unknown future or would they return to England? They decided to stay and their luck began to change. Friendly Native Americans helped them plant 30 acres of wheat and build permanent shelters. By the fall of 1621 their homes were built and their crops were harvested. They decided to observe a day of thanksgiving to thank God for his blessings. It was day of worship and food. However, the story doesn't end there.

George Washington declared a Thanksgiving Day in 1783 because the Revolution was over. Years later, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November 1863, as "a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father." Each year afterward, for 75 years, the President formally proclaimed that Thanksgiving Day should be celebrated on the last Thursday of November. But in 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt set it one week earlier. He wanted to help the struggling economy by lengthening the shopping season. In 1941, Congress declared the fourth Thursday of November a national holiday, Thanksgiving! It is that law that makes this year's Thanksgiving seem early. There are five Thursdays in this November. What does all this history mean? What does all this history teach us?

It teaches us that Thanksgiving is not just a holiday, it is a well-deserved rest. It teaches us that Thanksgiving is not just a meal, turkey and stuffing. It teaches us Thanksgiving is an attitude. You can eat all the right food on the right day and not experience thanksgiving. Where did you fix your eyes on Thanksgiving Day? Did you look at everything you have or did you look at everything you want? Those early settlers knew two things we have forgotten. First, everything we have in this world is temporary. Second, everything we have in this world is a gift from God. That is why we need to hold everything of value with our palms up and open. That way it doesn't hurt so badly when it is taken away. If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**" Let us look at this morning's scripture text together.

Today, we are looking at the one-hundredth Psalm. As I said in the opening words, a Psalm is nothing more than an ancient poet that was set to music. The music has been lost and only the words remain. Every Psalm is a song of praise. The one-hundredth Psalm is no exception. Let me read it to you one more time.

1 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

2 Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.

3 Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.

5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

You do not need an advanced degree. Just read the words for yourself. David is reminding us of two basic things. First, we were made by God. Second, God cares for us.

There is only one correct response to this kind of love. We must worship God in a spirit of thanksgiving. Verse four says, *"Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name."* The divine truth is as true today as it was generations ago, only the world has changed. The gates and the court refer to the temple in Jerusalem. They were destroyed shortly after Jesus' early ministry. However, that does not change the divine truth. When you came to church today did you come to give thanks and praise to God? Or, when you came to church today did you have a different agenda? How you answer that question is very important. In your heart of hearts, take an inventory of the words you have uttered since you entered this building. How many words of praise have you uttered? How many words have you uttered that revolve around your own agenda? You can be in a church building and not worship.

Many have compared the contemporary American church to Warren Wiersby's story about the seminary student in Evanston, Illinois. His name was Edward Spencer. He was part of a life-saving squad. In 1860 a ship went down in Lake Michigan. Spencer waded again and again into the frigid waters to rescue seventeen passengers. In the process, his health was permanently damaged. He never fully recovered and several years later he died. This is the sad truth. Not one of the seventeen individuals who Spencer saved came to his funeral to thank him. I hope that isn't your story. In your heart of hearts, take an inventory of the words you have uttered since you entered this building. How many words of praise have you uttered? How many words have you uttered that revolve around your own agenda? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

Today, I want to talk about the attitude you brought to church. It is my experience in church that we are more comfortable complaining about something than we are praising God. This is the problem. Negative words in the life of the church do damage in three ways. First, they damage your understanding of God. Critical words **deny** God's sovereignty. Second, your critical words **disrupt** Christian unity. Are we united in the name of Jesus or are divided into groups? Third, critical words **discredit** your witness. Let me state the obvious. I am preaching to the choir. You folks would never utter critical words in church. You only utter words that are positive and supportive. However, you may know of somebody in some other church that may relate to this message. Never forget what Mark Twain said, *"80% of the people who listen to your complaints don't care. The other 20% think you deserve it!"* This is also true. Those that criticize the most are criticized the most. If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** I am going to move through these three quickly.

Denies

When you enter his gates with critical negative words you deny God sovereignty. Listen to what I am about to say. Complaining people are telling the world they are not happy. They are telling the world something is not up to their standards. When you complain it is all about you! You are the one who is setting the standard. That is why the room is always too hot or cold. That is why people who don't act like you frustrate you. That is why people who don't think like you or hold your core values irritate you. Do I have to go on? When you complain it is all about you! This is the problem. Church is not about you. Church is about God. It is God who sets the standard. People don't come to hear about you. People come to church to hear about Jesus. People come to church to experience God! If you have ever heard someone utter a critical negative word at church say, **"Amen!"**

Disrupts

When you enter his gates with critical negative words, you disrupt Christian unity. In the perfect church we are all united in the name of Jesus. That sounds good but it is hard to do. As a matter of fact it doesn't happen very often. The most challenging part of any pastor's job is uniting the people. If you have ever uttered those words, "Why don't people support this?" then you understand my frustration. It is my experience church seldom unites around a program. However, it is my experience people will unite around a crisis. Churches will unite when the building burns down. Church will unite to get rid of a hated pastor. Churches will unite at some natural disaster. The good news we don't face a crisis very often. They seldom come so the church is generally not united. Satan loves this fact. A content church is the perfect breeding ground for complaints. I used to think people complained because they had a lot of problems. I have learned people have lots of problems because they complain. Complaining doesn't change anything or make situations better. Complaints amplifies frustration, spreads discontent and discord. Proverbs six tells us there are six things the Lord hates. One of those things is a person who stirs up conflict in the community. If you have ever heard someone utter a critical negative word at church, say, **"Amen!"**

Discredits

When you enter his gates with critical negative words you discredit your own testimony. A. W. Tozier said, *"Among those sins most exquisitely fitted to injure the soul and destroy the testimony, few can equal the sin of complaining."* This is as practical as I can make it. In church people vote two ways. First, people vote with their feet. If they like what is happening they come. Second, they vote with their wallets. If they like what is happening they give. If they don't like what is happening then they don't come or give. There is something ugly about that behavior. As a pastor I am not afraid to let those people walk away. They didn't really come for the right reason. I have never been interested in membership. I am only interested in discipleship. Never forget! You are an ambassador of Jesus Christ. In other words, you are to be representing Jesus in this world. How are you doing with your assignment? You may be the only Bible someone ever reads. Are you representing Jesus in a way this is pleasing to him or are you an embarrassment? If you have ever heard some utter a critical negative word at church, say, **"Amen!"**

So on this Thanksgiving weekend I am not going to end this message with an inspirational story. I am going to end this message with a challenge. I challenge you to evaluate your attitude and words since you have entered church this morning. This is Thanksgiving weekend! Is your heart filled with gratitude? Have your words been negative and critical? Those are the words Satan loves. Negative critical words deny God sovereignty. Negative critical words destroy Christian unity. Negative critical words discredit your own witness. Have the words that came out of your mouth been positive and affirming? Those are the words that God loves. Do you remember today's scripture?

**Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.**

And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**