

## **Sermon Text (Psalm 100 ESV)**

- <sup>1</sup> Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!  
<sup>2</sup> Serve the Lord with gladness!  
Come into his presence with singing!  
<sup>3</sup> Know that the Lord, he is God!  
It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.  
<sup>4</sup> Enter his gates with thanksgiving,  
and his courts with praise!  
Give thanks to him; bless his name!  
<sup>5</sup> For the Lord is good;  
his steadfast love endures forever,  
and his faithfulness to all generations.

## **God's Love Endures Forever**

Thanksgiving is many things to many people. To some, it's the Thanksgiving Day Parade, in which giant parade balloons of their favorite characters float down the streets of New York. To others, it's the Thanksgiving Day football game, complete with a halftime show that's performed by some of their favorite celebrities. Still, to others, it's simply getting to spend time with their friends and family. But, of course, if Thanksgiving is anything, it has to be Thanksgiving dinner: turkey; stuffing; mashed potatoes and gravy; pumpkin pie! In fact, Thanksgiving dinner is such a big part of Thanksgiving that many people go without eating all day and even wear stretchy pants in preparation for the massive feast.

Now, these are all perfectly fine things to do on Thanksgiving, but what many people fail to realize is that the true meaning of the holiday is right there in the name: Thanksgiving. It's a day in which we are to give thanks, but give thanks for what? The psalmist answers this question by saying in our reading for today, "Give thanks to [the Lord]; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations" (verses 4–5). Through the love and faithfulness that he shows us, God proves that he is good and worthy of our thanks. But how does God show his love and faithfulness to us? The psalmist also answers this question

by saying, “It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (verse 3).

This verse paints God in two ways: as our Creator and our Good Shepherd. As our Creator, God shows his love for us by giving us life. Without him, none of us would even exist in the first place. As Psalm 139 says, “[Y]ou formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb” (verse 13). As our Good Shepherd, God shows his love for us by preserving us. Everything that we have comes from God, and God makes sure that we have everything that we need, like a shepherd leading his sheep to green pastures and flowing water. As Psalm 145 says, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season” (verse 15). But it isn’t just because God provides for us that we’re alive, it’s also because God protects us, like a shepherd who fights off the hungry wolves that are after his sheep. As Psalm 91 says, “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways” (verse 11).

God being our Creator and Good Shepherd in our earthly lives is enough of a reason to give thanks to him, but God is also our Creator and Good Shepherd in our spiritual lives. God wants you to be with him in heaven, where you will never want for anything. However, because of the countless sins that you committed, you were not able to stand in the presence of a perfect God and were doomed to be cast out from his presence into hell, where you would pay the price for your sins for all eternity.

There was no way that you could change your fate and enter God’s presence on your own, but God the Father didn’t want to leave you to your fate. He loved you too much to do that. So, he sent his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to earn the honor of entering his presence for you. Jesus was the only one who was worthy of entering the presence of God the Father, because he alone lived a perfect life. But he willingly chose to give up that honor and take your place as your holy

substitute instead. Jesus died an innocent death on the cross, taking all of your sins on himself and paying the price for them, so that your perfect, heavenly Father would no longer see your imperfections. He also applied his perfect life to your life so that you are able to enter the presence of your perfect Father in heaven. All that God did to save you is summed up by the apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, in which he says, “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The blessings that Jesus won for you by his perfect life and innocent death are brought to you and made your own through the waters of baptism. In those holy waters, your old sinful self is drowned, and your new holy self is born, rising to the surface. While you were once spiritually dead, God has given you new life. As the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans, “We were buried . . . with [Christ] by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

However, your faith is just like your physical body: it needs nourishment, or it will die. Thankfully, God did not leave you alone once he brought you to faith but continues to nourish your faith by feeding you his Word. Every time you enter his presence in this life, every time you gather around his Word with other believers, you hear the good news of what Jesus has done to save you and of how God continues to work to preserve you.

Because of this, your faith is preserved and strengthened, but your faith needs more than just nourishment. It also needs protection, protection from your spiritual enemies (the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature) who are constantly trying to lead you astray so that you won't get to enter God's perfect presence. These spiritual enemies of yours try every trick in the book on you: they tell you that your sins aren't so bad, and that everyone else is doing them anyway; they tell you that you need to reject God in order to fit in with the rest of the world and be accepted by

them; they tell you that God is a liar and that he doesn't do the things that he says he does, so you shouldn't follow him; and they tell you that there is no way that God could ever forgive you of your sins, so you should just give up hope. Sometimes, your spiritual enemies are wolves in sheep's clothing, and other times, they shed their disguises and reveal their true nature. They play the role of both friend and foe, whatever it takes to win against you.

But there is no need for you to fear your spiritual enemies, for God is always there to protect you from them, like a shepherd who is always there to fight off the hungry wolves that are after his sheep. They cannot harm you, nor do their accusations succeed against you, for Jesus has paid the price for all your sins, and as a result, eternal life in heaven is yours. As Jesus says in the gospel according to St. John, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

So, we see that God is not only our Creator, Preserver, and Protector in our earthly lives, but also in our spiritual lives. For all this, we ought to give thanks to God. But there are times when we are tempted to think that there isn't much to give thanks to God for at all, especially when we take a look around us and see the troubles that we all face every day. There are times when prices seem to keep going up on everything, making it harder and harder to provide for ourselves and our families. Our loved ones keep getting sick and dying. There continues to be war and violence throughout the world. And the world continues to encourage sinful behavior, seemingly wanting us to accept every kind of lifestyle, no matter how sinful it is, while, at the same time, rejecting those who are Christians, and even attacking them. Because of everything that's going wrong in the world, it can sometimes make us wonder: is God truly in control? And if that thought starts to creep into our minds, it can tempt us to abandon God and turn to others for answers.

Thankfully, even though there are times when we aren't faithful to God, God always remains faithful to us. Jesus describes just how faithful to us he is in the parable of the lost sheep, in which he says, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing" (Luke 15:4-5). Like a shepherd, God does not abandon his sheep that have wandered off, but he drops everything to find his lost sheep and bring them back to his flock. He accomplishes this through the preaching of his Word, the same Word that he uses to nourish our faith. When the Word is preached to us, we are first made aware of the sins that we committed that caused us to go astray. But then, we receive the comfort that we have the forgiveness of sins because Jesus has paid the price for all our sins by his innocent death on the cross, that he endured out of his great love for us.

Knowing all that God has done for us, and especially knowing what he has done to save us from our sins and open the gates of heaven to us, we are moved to give him thanks. But this thanksgiving is not limited to just one day of the year, nor is it limited to just when we go to church, but we show thanksgiving to God every day, in all that we say and do. We can't help but give thanks to God, because in every area of our lives (in how God made us, provides for our needs, guards us from danger, keeps our faith alive, and especially in how God sent his only begotten Son to save us), we know that God's love endures forever. As the explanation to the First Article of the Creed says, "[F]or all [this] I am in duty bound to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him."