

**PREPARING OUR MINDS AND HEARTS:
THE NEARNESS OF TWO SPECIAL SEASONS**

Walking through the airport Monday evening, I could not help but notice that Love Field was being decorated with the symbols that something special was in the offing. Numerous workers were putting up the lights and wreaths that mark the celebration of the gift into our world of the Lord Jesus. I was fascinated by the bright colors (greens, reds, whites) that spoke to me of a coming celebration.

We are entering a season composed of two celebrations: one is a remembrance as a nation of God's providential blessings, the other the remembrance of the condescension of God in assuming humanity that He might later assume our debt. The former is a universal celebration of remembrance in our nation focusing on God's common grace and the sacrifices of those whom God enabled to bring us the peace and security we enjoy daily as citizens of a prosperous and wonderfulness nation. The latter is a celebration of God's non-universal, special grace within our nation, the Kingdom of Man, consisting of the invisible Kingdom of God, at least from the perspective of Christian Faith. Both celebrations are intensely family oriented in the form that it takes. Both are expressions of gratitude. One celebrates the gifts of political tranquility and the blessing that God has poured out upon us this year.

What makes Thanksgiving a joyful celebration and the gift of our Lord's advent so meaningful? The former is recognition of horizontal mercies, the latter of divine mercies. The former looks at God's grace to our families and nation in the past year, the latter the ring of eternity. All of this is possible because in our Lord's coming, His purpose was to lift us above temporalities, however meaningful and profoundly appreciated, to the wonder of divine forgiveness, peace, and life in the very presence of God. The former announces a season of thankfulness; the latter is the reason (God's incomprehensible mercies through the condescension of the Lord Jesus, the final sacrifice).

Congregational Song: "Now Thank We all our God" (Martin Rinkart, a Lutheran pastor, 1636)

As citizens of our civil body politic, we are grateful to God for 248 years of God's sustaining grace. Our republic was conceived and sustained, as all worthy endeavors are, at significant sacrifice. To protect and preserve our

citizenry innumerable sacrifices have been and are being made on battlefields around the world. Numerous statesmen and women have served in the halls of state and federal offices to preserve the dream of 1776. It has not been an easy road as we can all attest; yet God sustained us through unimagined crises. We live in peace; we live with freedoms that few have experienced over the centuries. We should, and must, express our thankfulness as we gather in our homes with our family to feast, smile, joke, and laugh amid a rich heritage and bountiful provisions.

For we who have experienced the unmerited, unexpected, personally uncaused mercies of Christ, there is an even deeper cause for thankfulness. In fact, Thanksgiving Day celebration is an effect, a consequence of something far greater, the blessing of God in the gift of Jesus, the only true monarch who graciously guides us today in the Kingdom of Man until mere temporalities cease with the eternal kingdom of the Son of God. We must not diminish the beauty of temporalities, but, at best, such are shadowed anticipations of our eternal citizenship under the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, King Jesus.

The blessing of shadows that we have annually celebrated as a holiday of thankfulness was proposed by Mr. Washington on 3 October 1789 in the context of the ratification process of our new constitution, though implementation was left to the prerogative of each state in the union (Mr. Lincoln made it a federal holiday in 1863). However, you and I know a deeper, more profound reason to celebrate because the shadowed, wonderful blessings that come to us daily, flows ultimately from the gift of God at Christmas, the Lord Jesus. He alone is the final cause of the blessedness of temporalities. He, someday, will turn for us mere temporal shadows into eternal and unimaginable blessings.

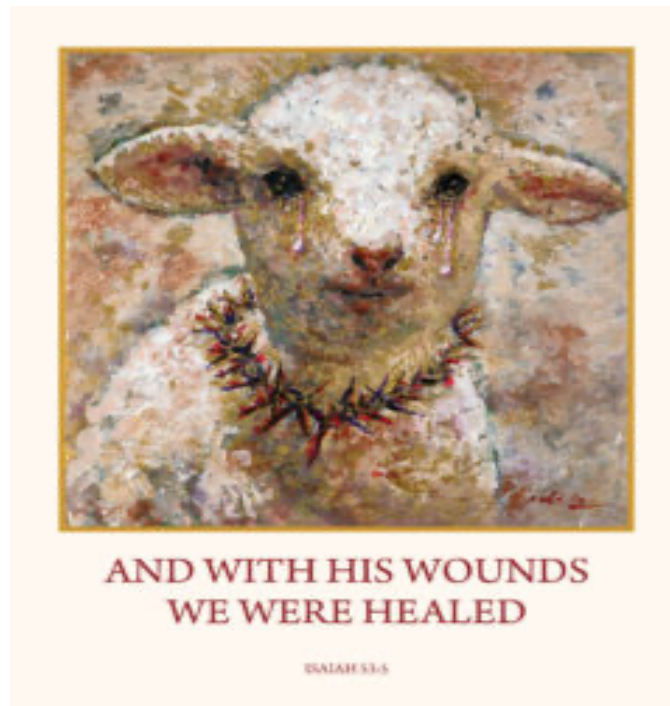
“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!
For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or
who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?
For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be the glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).”

Thus, we come to celebrate the cause of all blessings, temporal and eternal, the gift of God in Bethlehem’s manger. While we will focus on the story of our Lord’s coming in subsequent weeks, I think it appropriate to commence this special season with the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples the day before He purchased our redemption through the sacrifice of Himself, three days

before God provided proof of the accomplishment of His victory over death by the resurrection.

“...do this in remembrance of Me (I Cor. 11: 24).”

“...you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes (I Cor. 11:26).”



(The painting above is by a Jewish friend in Jerusalem, Udi, who has a shop in the Jewish Quarter of the city.)

Congregational Song: “When I Survey the Wonderful Cross” (Isaac Watts, 1707)”

The Service of the Bread

What is the symbolism of the bread at the Lord’s table? It suggests the life that He lived proving that He was qualified to pay the price of redemption being the spotless (sinless) “Lamb of God.” “He made Him who knew not sin sin for us... I Cor. 5:21).” As you meditate with bread in your hands, think of Our Lord’s life that qualified Him to be your redeemer?

“Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing
He broke it... and said, ‘Take eat, this is My
body (Matt 26:26).”

The Service of the Cup

The symbolism of the cup is found in the symbolism of its contents, the purchase price demanded by the justice of God was absolute conformity to the demands of justice. Only God could do so, mankind does not possess the character to do so, though mankind ought. Our story is that He who ought not, a perfect man and perfect God, did when he became sin for us.

“...this is My blood of the covenant, which is shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28).”



Congregational Song: “When the Roll is Called Up Yonder” (J.M. Black, 1893)

Concluding Prayer