Sermon for Thanksgiving

Text: Psalm 66:1-3
Praise God with shouts of joy, all people! Sing to the glory of his name; offer him glorious praise! Say to God, "How wonderful are the things you do!"

Praise God with shouts of joy

It's true that we often don't appreciate something until we don't have it any longer. This statement might cause us to reflect on how much we have taken our job for granted and it’s only when we are faced with a change in our work situation that we realize what a wonderful thing it was to have regular work, an income we could rely on and the security that our work gives us. It’s easy to overlook the every day things that make up our life and it’s only when we no longer have good health, or we are separated from family, or a close friend or loved one is taken through death
that we suddenly miss what we had taken so much for granted.

A teenage girl wrote, "To cut a long story short my boyfriend’s 18 year old cousin was paralyzed last year in a car crash. We used to hang out a lot and get up to all kinds of crazy stuff but seeing him in hospital made me realize that I have taken so much for granted. The other day as I was pulling on my jeans, it hit me how lucky I am to be able to do that because my boyfriend’s cousin will never be able to do something as simple as pull on jeans and sneakers and go for a walk".

A widow explained how much she missed her husband saying, "Everyday I complained about the shaving cream and whiskers that were left in the bathroom basin. Now when I go into the bathroom I look into the basin and wish that there were shaving cream and whiskers stuck to the sides. I miss him so much but it has made me aware of how precious the people in my life really are to me".

I’m sure all of us have a long list of things and people in our lives that we just presume will always be there for us. We don’t set out to be so ungrateful. It just seems to happen that we take so much for granted and don’t give a thought how essential these are to our happiness and well-being. We show so little appreciation and gratitude.

Someone once said, "We tend to forget that happiness doesn't come as a result of getting something we don't have, but rather of recognizing and appreciating what we do have."

And so we come to this Thanksgiving Service today with the express purpose of recognizing, appreciating and thanking God for the people and the things that are such an essential
part of our lives.

Our Bible readings today tell us that thankfulness doesn’t come naturally. The first reading reminds the Old Testament people that they are about to live in is "a land that has rivers and springs, and underground streams gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land that produces wheat and barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and honey. There you will never go hungry or ever be in need" (Deuteronomy 8:7-9). They are reminded that this land is not something that they have earned, or deserved, or worked hard to own. They are reminded in no uncertain terms not to forget to thank the One who has given all this to them.

God knows what will happen. They will forget. They will convince themselves that they have earned the blessings that the land will give them and forget who has so generously given them everything. So the people are commanded to be thankful. "Make certain you do not forget the Lord your God. … Remember that it is the Lord who has given you everything you need" (Deut 8:11,18).

In the gospel reading Jesus heals ten lepers but only one of those healed came back to acknowledge and thank Jesus. Expressing our appreciation and gratitude is easy to overlook. Maybe this has something to do with our own selfish and sinful natures. We are so focused on ourselves, what are our rights and what we deserve, and how much we aren’t appreciated that we fail to see what others are doing for us.

The psalmist says, Praise God with shouts of joy, all people! Sing to the glory of his name; offer him glorious praise! Say to God, "How wonderful are the things you do! The apostle Paul repeats this call to thanksgiving when he writes, "Sing
psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts" (Col 3:16). A spirit of thanksgiving is the mark of a Christian. What do we have to be so thankful for?

1. **We thank God for the material blessings he gives us.** It has been a characteristic of people throughout the ages that we are never satisfied with what we have. From the first pages of the Bible, people have sought to get more and more for themselves often at the expense of other people and more often without any recognition that it is God who provides everything that we need. I am reminded of King David’s prayer recorded in the last chapter of the First Book of Chronicles. “**Lord God of our ancestor Jacob, may you be praised forever and ever!** You are great and powerful, glorious, splendid, and majestic. Everything in heaven and earth is yours, and you are king, supreme ruler over all.

   All riches and wealth come from you; you rule everything by your strength and power; and you are able to make anyone great and strong. **Now, our God, we give you thanks, and we praise your glorious name**” (1 Chronicles 29:10-13).

What a magnificent prayer acknowledging that God richly provides us with everything that we need every day. The air that we breathe every day of our lives, the simple glass of water, the food on our tables, the clothes that we wear, the sources of energy that light up our rooms and power our cars, the beauty of God's world and beyond that cause us to gasp in wonder, peace to bring up our families and worship God, freedom to come and go as we choose, sport, leisure, medicine, healing and health, the peace and safety that we have in this country — there is little doubt that God has gone to extremes to provide us with so many material blessings.
There is a danger that we can become so focused on accumulating more and more material goods that we become dissatisfied with what we have. A spirit of thankfulness to God for his daily provision of all we need makes all the difference. Instead of being in a frenzy about material things we will learn to appreciate what we already have and to be more reliant on God's goodness.

2. We thank God for the people in our lives. It’s so easy to take people for granted, or even to complain and get angry and frustrated because they don’t come up to our expectations. As we come into God's presence with thanksgiving today we give him thanks for our spouses, our children, our relatives, our friends, our colleagues at work, those who serve us in some way like teachers, nurses, doctors, plumbers, electricians and others who help us in some way.

Often it is those who are the closest to us that we appreciate the least. How many marriages and family relationships grow cold and eventually shatter because people are taken for granted. We fail to show our appreciation and thank them for what they mean to us and what they have done for us. How often have people become discouraged and disheartened because they feel that no one cares about them or appreciates what they have to offer?

These people have their faults and no doubt will let us down at some time, but that doesn’t lessen the fact in any way that God has richly blessed us through these people.

Today we thank God for those who love us and serve us in some way and as we do that let’s also make a point of expressing our appreciation to the individuals who are special to us.
3. We thank God when we are in the middle of difficult circumstances. Without a doubt no one likes it when life takes us down roads that we would rather not travel. This may include sickness, grief, accident, the impact of someone else’s foolishness in your health and quality of life, even persecution for your Christian faith.

The apostle Paul faced all kinds of hardship and difficulty and yet, even while sitting in a jail cell, he could still sing songs of praise to God. How could he give thanks to God even though his life was in danger? He explains it like this, "I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have more than enough. I have learned this secret, so that anywhere, at any time, I am content, whether I am full or hungry, whether I have too much or too little. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me (Col 4:12-13).

When Daniel learned that his enemies were plotting to destroy him, he didn’t go to pieces or panic. We are told he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to God, just as he had done before (Daniel 6:10). He knew that even though things could have been better, God would always be "his refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble" (Psalm 46:1). The Bible commands, "Be thankful in all circumstances" (1 Thess 5:18). We have a God who loves us and has promised that his love and mercy will follow us all the days of our life. There is nothing that can separate us from his love.

I don't know what trials you may be facing right now—but God does, and he loves you and is with you through the Holy Spirit. Be thankful that God stands by his baptismal promise to you, "I'll be with you always until to the end of time".

4. We thank God especially for his salvation in Jesus
Christ. God has given us the greatest gift of all—his Son, who died on the cross and rose again so that we can know him personally and spend eternity with him in heaven. We join with the apostle Paul saying, "Let us thank God for his priceless gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15). The Bible tells us that we are separated from God because we have sinned. But God loves us and wants us to be part of his family forever. He loves us so much that he sent his only Son into the world to die as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.

The Holy Spirit calls us to repentance and faith – to turn away from our sinful lives and trust in Jesus and his love for us. We shouldn’t let a day go by without thanking God for his mercy and his grace to us in Jesus Christ.

5. We thank God for his continued presence and power in your life. We have been given the Holy Spirit to help us follow Jesus as his disciples. We have been given the kind of new life that is refocused and given a new direction. No longer are we satisfied being selfish, ungrateful and self-focused. We are people who belong to God and want to let the love of Christ change us and the way we interact with other people. When we are disappointed in ourselves for the way we have lived our Christian faith, when we give into temptation and doubt, or are overwhelmed by lives problems, we are reminded we have God on our side. He invites us to pray and promises to use his power on our problems. Paul says, "Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart" (Phil 4:6).

Today’s service has a special focus on giving thanks but for the Christian every day is a day of thanksgiving. Every day gives us new reasons to follow the psalmist’s advice and
"praise God with shouts of joy! Sing to the glory of his name; offer him glorious praise!"