



## Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

[www.goodshepherdwi.org](http://www.goodshepherdwi.org)

---

**Thanksgiving Day**

**November 23, 2017**

---

### **“Giving Thanks for the Everyday Miracles**

*(Numbers 11:4-10)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, ‘Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at . . . And the anger of the LORD blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased” (Numbers 11:4-10).*

**Collect:** Almighty God, Your mercies are new every morning and You graciously provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your goodness, give thanks for Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience all our days; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

---

Can you imagine? The miracle of the manna had become so dependable, so predictable, so commonplace that they didn't even think of it as a miracle anymore. It didn't astonish them. They didn't feel grateful for it. To the contrary, they had grown weary of it, complained about it. They wanted something better, and thought they deserved something better too.

You think that ever happens today? With all the blessings God has given us, you think they can become so commonplace that we don't even think of them as blessings anymore? We grow accustomed to them, take them for granted, think of them as entitlements, and yearn for something more, something better?

I remember as a child we had a pastor from Africa visit my home congregation and he talked about taking his first walk through an American supermarket. He could not believe the abundance and variety, but he also noticed how we stroll through a super market, so casually accustomed to the blessings all around us, with heaping mounds of exotic fruit and fresh vegetables even during the cold winter months. "You Americans" he said, "you have no idea of how blessed you are!" And he's right, isn't he? We very easily adapt to the blessings of God, and very quickly begin to think of them as ordinary entitlements. We forget God is constantly working behind the scenes to make life possible for us and even good.

Here's a wonderful quote from Luther about every day blessings and miracles: "[Most people] are so accustomed to [the works of God in nature]; they are as permeated with them as an old house is with smoke; they use

them and wallow around in them like a sow in an oats sack. Oh, they say, is it so marvelous that the sun shines? That fire heats? That water contains fish? . . . That the earth yields grain? That a cow bears calves? That a woman gives birth to children? Why, this happens every day!” You dear dolt” Luther says, (and he’s talking to you and me now), “must it be insignificant because it happens daily?” Luther then remembers how Adam was made out of the dust and imagines if that was the normal way even today that people came to be, just directly out of the dust at God’s command. And he says, “If God created . . . only one woman who was able to bear children, I maintain that the whole world, kings and lords, would worship her as a divinity. But now that every woman is fruitful, it passes for nothing . . . Is it not vexing to see the accursed ingratitude and blindness of mankind?” (Quoted from 500: The Impact of the Reformation Today, p. 20).

Similarly, on the miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, Wendell Berry wrote: “Whoever really has considered the lilies of the field or the birds of the air and pondered the improbability of their existence will hardly balk at the turning of water into wine which was, after all, a very small miracle. We forget the greater and still continuing miracle by which water (with soil and sunlight) is turned into grapes.” In other words, you try to do that! You try to create a plant out of nothing that will do that!

Keep thinking about those common, everyday blessings around, the daily manna, for which we so often forget to be grateful, and about which we might even complain.

Have you ever looked through a book of photographs of individual snow crystals? Each is beautiful and extraordinary and unique. Or look at them falling on your black coat sleeve and get a glimpse of them before they melt, and it’s almost as if God is winking at us, “Yep, I’m still here, and it’s going to be ok.” Put billions of them together in your driveway, however, and we might complain and weep as bitterly as the Israelites.

Or consider the common egg, a dozen for less than a dollar at the grocery store, a little more for the cage free and organic version. But what a thoughtful gift of God to us! It's as if God was thinking to himself, "You know, they're going to need something to help them make good bread and brownies." So he creates a creature called a hen, one of only a few birds that will lay eggs one after another, even when they haven't been fertilized, even when there's no chance of them ever hatching into a chick . . . so that you and I have something to scramble, or bring to a soft boil or to order over easy on top of the breakfast skillet at the Main Street Cafe. A well cooked egg seldom disappoints. But then come all the other things you can do with them: omelettes and crepes and German Apple Pancakes and a myriad of breads, and for the risk takers, the occasional soufflé. How many good recipes start out with butter, brown sugar, vanilla, and eggs?! The egg is just one more good gift of God to us. The only real problem with the egg is that it's so common and easily purchased that we no longer think of it as a blessing.

Husbands, let's think about our wives for a moment. Remember how glad and grateful you were when you first met. It seemed almost a miracle that one so beautiful could find you attractive too, and might even be willing to spend the rest of her life with you. So you splurged on a ring and when she said "yes", you nearly skipped and twirled down the street as if on the set of "Singing in the Rain." And you gave thanks to God. But you know how it is. Because she's doing what she promised to do, namely spend the rest of her life with you, that means she's always around. So there's the risk that you will grow weary of her as the Israelites did the manna. There's the risk you will take her for granted, and forget what a great blessing God has given you in your spouse. There's the risk you will forget to thank her, regularly, routinely, and to thank God for her. There's the risk your voice will be added among the rabble, complaining about the manna, wishing you had something different, something younger, prettier.

Or maybe it's your work. Not all of you, but

certainly some of you were initially surprised that your employer was willing to pay you so much to do what you do, which you and I both know really isn't that big of a deal. But what a nice salary they gave and with good benefits and you were so grateful. But then time passes . . . and work becomes a grind, "by the sweat of your brow" sort of thing, and when Monday morning rolls around your attitude can be something like: "I never see anything but this manna!" And if your employer runs into trouble, and has to freeze or even trim salaries, then it becomes clear how entirely accustomed and entitled we feel about that for which we were (once upon a time) so grateful.

We are so blessed. Many Wisconsinites every now and then like to go to a good old fashioned Friday night fish fry. We plop ourselves down, and are served hand and foot. We don't even have to lift a finger except maybe to ask for extra tartar sauce. Maybe it was baked cod that came from the deep cold waters near Iceland about 3,000 miles east of here, with fresh lemon wedges that came from California, some 1600 miles in the opposite direction. So much has to happen for that Fish Fry to land on the table before you, and God uses so many different people to make it happen for you. Granted, it's not a big audacious miracle; if by that you're thinking of those people sitting on a hillside by the Sea of Galilee, and it's not Jesus breaking the fish and the loaves to miraculously satisfy your hunger along with 5,000 others. But it's somewhere on the same continuum, isn't it, with extraordinary miracle at the one end, and ordinary, everyday blessing at the other. It's somewhere on the same continuum. Wherever it falls, it's God's work, it's God doing, and we owe him a debt of thanks for it. Either nothing is a miracle, or everything is. So why not at the Fish Fry, before you dive in, why not give thanks to God, right there at Lopyy's in Ixonia? Don't be embarrassed or ashamed, and don't make a big show. Just quietly give thanks to God. And afterwards, be sure to thank God's servants too, the waitress, and maybe give a little wave of thanks to the bartender and a thumbs up to a cook you see

through the little window of the door.

“Be thankful in all circumstances” Paul wrote in our Epistle. Find a way to be grateful.

So you have a husband who’s a coach potato on the weekends watching way too much football. How can you be thankful for that? Well, at least he’s home with you and not at a bar with some floozy.

For the taxes you pay, why be grateful for that? Because it means you’re employed; and because our government is also serving us by providing good roads and clean drinking water and a defense against those who would destroy us if they could.

How can we be thankful for all the sinister grumbling these days about our elected leaders? It must mean we have freedom of speech. And similarly, for all the possible stories of corruption in government, because it means we have a press that is free to practice journalism.

For the big mess to clean after Thanksgiving Dinner, because it means you were surrounded by people you love.

For clothes that feel a little snug, because it means you have plenty to eat.

For gutters that are mostly clogged with leaves, because it means you have a home.

For the hefty heating bill, because it means you’ve stayed warm.

For the lady behind you who sings out of tune, because it means you can hear, and also that you’re not worshipping alone.

For the occasional long and meandering sermon, because it means we still have freedom of religion.

None of this is new. The idea is to look for reasons to be thankful, and then be quick to say, if only silently, “Thank you, Lord.”

That he keeps giving us our daily bread, our manna, whether they are every day blessings or miracles, who can tell the difference? But that he keeps giving them to us though we don’t much notice or appreciate them. Thank you Lord.

That he has compassion on us, and is patient with us.  
Thank you Lord.

That he does not, in fact, deal with us according to our sins, but according to his mercy: thank you Lord.

That he has redeemed you with his own blood. That he has freed you from fears that would otherwise rob you of peace and joy. That he has made you his own child through Holy Baptism, and is even now, preparing a home for you in heaven, so that you too can be with him and with all the saints of God.  
Thank you Lord.

We don't deserve his mercy. We haven't earned his generosity. And we have the nasty habit of grumbling even about his blessings. And yet, he is so good and generous to us, and in Jesus, so gracious too. Thank you Lord. Amen.

