Church of the Lutheran Confession's

Ministry By Mail

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Romans 10:17

25th Sunday after Trinity

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Scripture Readings

1 Thessalonians 5:14-24; Luke 17:11-19

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941)

#36| #568 | #569 | #644

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Prayer of the Day

Faithful God and heavenly Father, You have made us Your people and redeemed us through Your Son. Fill our hearts with joy, our hands with willing service, and our minds with the knowledge of Your love, that we may receive Your gifts with thanksgiving and bless Your name all our days; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

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Sermon Text

(Psalm 100 NKJ) "Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! 2 Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. 3 Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. 4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. 5 For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations."

Theme

HOW OUGHT WE RESPOND TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS? With joy, with service, with understanding, and with thanksgiving!

In Christ Jesus, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude, dear fellow redeemed:

Once one of my students came up to me and informed me that I had made his list. "What list?" I asked. He explained that another teacher had assigned him the task of writing down a list of 100 things for which he was thankful. He initially thought that to be an impossible assignment, but in the end found it to be relatively easy. There are just so many blessings in our lives for which we can and ought to be thankful! I heartily approve of that assignment! It would, in fact, be an excellent exercise for each of us to do! Our God is always faithful—in every situation! HOW, my dear friends, then OUGHT WE TO RESPOND TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS? The psalmist urges us to do so with joy, with service, with understanding, and with thanksgiving!

I. The author of this psalm uses five imperatives to urge us believers to respond in four different ways to honor our God! The first is to respond with joy! The psalmist writes: "Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!"

The word "joy" is found nearly 200 times in our Bibles and is one of the great blessings God would have us experience in this life. There is a tremendous amount of sorrow in this world due to sin—our own sin and the sin of others. Satan wants to capitalize on that sorrow and fill our hearts both with sadness and with fear. Fear is one of Satan's greatest weapons, for it often immobilizes us and takes our eyes off our Savior God, who has created us, redeemed us, and promised to preserve us. But joy fills the hearts of all who are led in faith to entrust themselves to the grace of God—joy in the announcement of our forgiveness; joy in our calling as God's children; joy as heirs of His eternal kingdom; joy in the knowledge that we are held in the hands of our all-powerful Savior; and joy in the fact that our heavenly Father hears us every time we lift our voices to Him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving!

But notice that the people who are to do this are not just us believers—the call goes out to "all you lands!" There is reason for everyone in this world to shout with joy to the LORD! He is the Creator and Preserver of everyone. The apostle Paul reminds all of us that "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28a). Our Savior, Jesus, reminds us: "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt. 5:45).

When we consider the faithfulness of God in each of our lives—giving us those lives; preserving those lives; providing for our physical needs; bestowing upon us the gifts of family, friendship, community, and opportunities to use our gifts and talents in a variety of ways—and remember that the list could go on and on, how can we respond in any other way than with joy?

II. HOW OUGHT WE TO RESPOND TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS? Let us do so, secondly, with service! When I was a little boy growing up in southern Minnesota, my father was a pastor. He gave me the job of dusting the church pews. It was no real problem for

the first several years when we lived in the church basement. All I had to do was run upstairs—ten minutes and I was done. But after our family moved into a new parsonage, things changed. That weekly Saturday cleaning involved either walking or riding my bike to the church to dust those same pews. It took what seemed to me, as a ten-year-old boy, an unbelievable amount of time—maybe even forty-five minutes! On many occasions, in response to my repeated grumbling, "Do I have to?" my father would reply with what I was convinced was his favorite verse in Scripture: "Son, serve the LORD with gladness!"

My dear friends, what a privilege it is to serve God directly in His kingdom work or indirectly through our involvement at home, in school, in our places of work, or within our community—and to do so "with gladness!" God gives us wonderful opportunities to serve—whether we are talking about relatively mundane things like dusting church pews or changing light bulbs, or about sharing the gospel directly by teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir, or speaking about Jesus over the fence with our neighbor. All these are privileges!

When we consider how Jesus came into this world on our behalf—not "to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28)—and how, through God's faithfulness, our sins have been forgiven and our hope of eternal life has been secured, how can we help but "serve the LORD with gladness"?

III.Yes, HOW, my dear friends, OUGHT WE TO RESPOND TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS? Let us do so with joy, with service, and thirdly, with understanding! The psalmist writes: "Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture."

The psalmist reveals here two of the most basic and important truths. The first speaks to our identity and origin, and the second to our place in this world and in the world to come. Who are we, and how did we come to be? We are not the chance development of single-celled creatures. It was God who formed us in our mothers' wombs, bestowing upon each of us our unique qualities and characteristics (cf. Ps. 139:13–16). There are no self-made men or women. No, we are the objects of God's creative genius. We need to know that so that we can have a proper perspective on who we are and what we have been called upon to do in this life as we look forward to the next.

But that is not all we need to know as fallen human beings confronted by our own weaknesses and frequent failures—moral and otherwise. We need to know that our God has loved us despite our sin. The apostle Paul addresses this miracle of God's grace. He informs us: "When we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6–8).

It is this understanding of our heavenly Father's and Jesus' great love for and commitment to us that is the heart and core of our ministry as God's people. Ours is a universal calling in this life to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19–20).

IV. Yes, my dear friends, HOW OUGHT WE RESPOND TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS? Let us do so with joy, with service, with understanding, and finally with thanksgiving! Our text concludes: "Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations." One of the key factors in living a joyful and productive life in this world is thankfulness. That is why we are encouraged so many times in Scripture to give thanks to God. In fact, the apostle Paul suggests: "In everything (not just when experiencing good, but also when experiencing bad) give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thes. 5:18). This is God's will, for an attitude of gratitude brings with it great blessing for our lives!

This is why the psalmist emphasizes that, "The LORD is good!" He truly is! He has forgiven your sins and mine freely for Christ's sake. Sit down at some point later this evening or during the next week. Take out a sheet of paper and jot down YOUR 100 examples of God's blessings in your life. I am sure that just as it turned out to be an easy assignment for the young man who approached me, it will be an easy and instructive assignment for us all!

But as you write and think of the past, remember as well that there is reason to give thanks regarding the future, for God's "mercy is everlasting and His truth endures to all generations." Life is not always easy. Accidents happen, tragedies occur, people unexpectedly get hurt and at times die. We sin daily. Still in view of God's faithfulness, His mercy is always present to sustain us. No matter where life takes us and no matter what in life befalls us, God's mercy and His truth will be there to provide us help and consolation, guidance and direction. For that, my dear friends we can be ever so thankful!

My dear friends, HOW, OUGHT WE RESPOND TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS? Let us do so with joy, with service, with understanding, and with thanksgiving! Amen.

Pastor Em. Paul Nolting

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