

Celebrate the Lord's Goodness

September 15, 2019 – Psalm 100:4-5 (NIV)

We thank the Lord for bringing Pastor Weber to guest preach for the 2:30 p.m. Service as St. John's celebrated 150 years of God's grace.

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name. For the LORD is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.”

150 years ago, Pastor Friedrich Schmid organized a group of German immigrant Lutherans into a congregation here in Northfield Township. That group took the name, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church. Obviously, none of us were present when that took place. But today, 150 years later, we are still enjoying the Lord's blessings which arose from that humble beginning. To be sure, there have been so many changes since then. According to your history, the congregation has been served by 23 different pastors. Just think of the number of souls which have been touched through those 150 years, both of those who have been members, but also all those who have been touched by those who have been members of this congregation. There have been joyous occasions as you sought the Lord's blessings at baptisms, confirmations, and marriages. You also gathered to seek the Lord's comfort when He called loved ones to Himself in realms of the glory of heaven. It is no wonder that this anniversary is so special, and needs to be celebrated. The verses which you have chosen as the theme for this anniversary celebration are so very appropriate, for they serve to focus our attention on what is most important for us all to remember on this special occasion. Right now, we are doing exactly what the Psalmist is encouraging us to do — to come before the Lord and CELEBRATE HIS GOODNESS. On this, your 150th anniversary, we celebrate 1) His mercy. We also celebrate 2) His faithfulness.

For the first years after its organization as a congregation, they met at Sutton School about a mile south of this location. But for the past 145 years, when St. John's wanted to gather in the Lord's house, they came to this site (though not to this same building). This afternoon we are again gathering before the Lord in His house to celebrate His goodness, as the Psalmist says, **“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.”** (4) We gather today to give thanks and praise to the One Whose goodness and love endures forever.

This special service today is meant to give thanks to the Lord for the many blessings which He has bestowed upon St. John's for these past 150 years. When you were taught to write a “thank you” note, you were not to be generic, but to refer to the gift which you had received from the giver of that gift. So, today, as we **enter His gates with thanksgiving**, what are the gifts which the Lord has given to St. John's these past 150 years for which you want to thank Him? Does the first thing that comes to mind include this beautiful building which has served as your house of worship for the past 87 years? Do you think about the improvements which you have been enabled to make to His house? Do you remember the pastors which fed you from God's Word through all of these years? Do you think of the members — the ones who taught you in Sunday School, the ones who went to confirmation class with you, and the ones with whom you have been able to worship in this church building? Certainly these are all blessings for which we want to give our thanks to God for granting them to us through all of these years.

Still, our thanks is to go far beyond these wonderful blessings. The Psalmist reminds us: **“For the LORD is good and his love endures forever.”** (5) From the beginning, God's goodness was proclaimed at St. John's as the forgiveness of sins was announced each week in the worship service. Each Christmas Eve the children have had the privilege of reminding us how God put into action His plan to bring that forgiveness to mankind as they announced the birth of our Savior. The Easter celebrations filled our hearts with joy as the message of the empty tomb was God's stamp of approval on all the work that His Son came to this world to do for us.

The glorious gospel message at the heart of the Bible has been faithfully proclaimed here for all of those past 150 years: *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16) He claimed us as His very own, holy children as we were brought to this baptismal font. We asked for His blessing of faithfulness to Him as we stood before His altar on the day of our confirmation. We came this altar to receive His body and blood for the assurance of the forgiveness of all of our sins. We came before Him for His comfort at the death of our loved ones, knowing for certain that their sins were all forgiven and they were now with the saints triumphant in heaven. Throughout the history of St. John’s, we confessed with the Psalmist, *“My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD.”* (Psalm 84:2) Our hearts always yearn to hear that wonderful message, *“Be of good cheer, your sins are all forgiven!”*

Today’s celebration reminds us of many things for which to give thanks, but centers on giving thanks to God for His mercy to us, that unfailing love which makes us His own very dear children through the forgiveness of sins. But the Psalmist also says that in addition to thanks, we are also to praise Him. Praise is different from thanks in that when we praise Him, we are no longer speaking to God, but now are speaking to others here on earth, announcing to them the wonders that our loving God has done, not only for us, but also for all people. We do that when we bring our children to Him as we share with them the wonders that He has done for us. That has been done here for generations these past 150 years. We do that when we bring our mission offerings to help spread this message throughout the world. You did that when you daughtered Immanuel Lutheran Church in South Lyon in 1930. You do that when You hold an anniversary celebration like this to proclaim how God’s mercy has been proclaimed here these past 150 years. You do that whenever you let your light of faith shine so that others see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Certainly we want to celebrate the Lord’s goodness in this anniversary service by thanking and praising Him.

The Psalmist continues, **“For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”** (5) As we celebrate the Lord’s goodness and the loving forgiveness which He showers upon us, we are to remember that His faithfulness continues through all generations. Your historical booklet gives evidences of that faithful love, not only in proclaiming His Word, but also in His loving care for you through these many years. Historical sketches like this usually concentrate on the wonderful blessings with which the Lord has blessed you. They do not usually speak of the difficult daily struggles which the congregation has had and how the Lord brought them safely through.. How many times in those 150 years do you think that there were concerns about the finances of the congregation? Whether it was when they first acquired this property and built their first church building and parsonage, or in those years when offerings did not seem to be enough to meet expenses. Still, you know what has happened each time — the Lord opened the hearts of His people to get through those difficult times.

I do not know if there are any of you here today that were present when the fire in 1932 totally destroyed both the church building and the parsonage next door. The Lord remained faithful to His people, and got them through that difficult time. Three months after that devastating fire, the new parsonage was dedicated. Then five months after that, the church building was completed and dedicated.

I was here when the decision was made to make the elevator addition. That decision did not come easily. I believe that there were at least 3 building committees that had been formed to make suggestions on how to make the building handicapped accessible. Each of these committees made recommendations, but none of them were adopted. There was also much debate about adding the elevator addition, including how much it was going to cost. But when the decision was finally made to do it, it was paid for without ever having to take out a loan on it. By dedication, the entire addition had been paid for!

These are just a couple of examples from your history of how the Lord has remained faithful to His promises that He would always be with you, and bring all of His blessings to you. You have witnessed that faithfulness in bringing you His Word, as well as His faithfulness of His loving care through past generations.

That same faithfulness will continue through the generations to come as well. We do not know what the future holds — whether He will return soon to take us all to be with Him in glory, or whether St. John's will continue for the next 150 years. But we do have His promise of faithfulness to His promises to bless us with His Word, and to care for us as long as we remain on earth. Just as He not abandoned us for the past 150 years, He will not abandon us in the future. We have His Word on that.

So, today, let us celebrate the Lord's goodness. As we look back on our history, we know that He always remains faithful to His promise of loving forgiveness which we cling in faith to. He also promises that He will be faithful to His promise to be with us to the very end of the age. May our past history help us to trust all that He has proclaimed to us.