

Mark D. Reichert

Thanksgiving Eve – Romans 8:28-39 – He’s Given Us Everything!

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In these weeks leading up to Thanksgiving, lots of people like to make lists about what they’re thankful for. For example, I’ve seen people going on Facebook and listing three things per day over a five-day period. The usual suspects – family, friends, health, home, God, and so on. Sometimes just sitting down and thinking about it and writing about it can really help us appreciate all the things that we do have, rather than worrying about all the things that we don’t.

But you know as well as I that there are a lot of things that’ve been going on lately that it can be awfully hard to be thankful for. Mass shootings like the one in Maine a few weeks back. Terrorist attacks like the ones in Israel last month. Costs rising faster than wages. Political pettiness and nastiness from both sides of the aisle. Somebody else went home with the deer your were really hoping to get this year! Now some are more severe than others no doubt, and I’m sure the list could go on. Everybody has something that we’d rather do without.

And you know, Jesus promised it was going to be that way. He promised that as the time gets closer and closer for Jesus to return, things are going to get worse and worse. People are going to hate each other. Nations are going to destroy each other. Wickedness is going to increase. Natural disasters are going to become more common. The world itself might seem like it’s tearing apart at the seams as the sin that caused all of it in the first place just keeps growing more and more destructive.

And that’s exactly why these words of Paul are so important for us at a time like Thanksgiving, because he tells us here what we have to be most thankful for. We can be thankful for turkey and mashed potatoes and gravy – believe me, I certainly am! But really, the things that we should be most thankful for are our spiritual blessings – the blessings that last, as well as the things that are blessings because they don’t. What Paul tells us about here in our lesson from Romans are blessings from God that last forever and that promise to put the pain of this sinful world behind us one day. And it reads like one of those Facebook lists of things to be thankful for – only these are a whole lot better than anything you’ll ever see on social media, because these are all about God’s grace in saving us from our sin and bringing us home to heaven.

So here’s that list of blessings we can all be thankful for: “*Those [God] predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*” Blessing #1: God predestined you, he chose you in love from before the world even began to be his child

and inherit his kingdom one day. That’s how much you mean to him and how dedicated he is to you! Blessing #2: God called you to faith and made his home in your heart through his Word and Sacraments, and even right now he’s still calling you toward your heavenly home. Blessing #3: When God brought you to faith, he also justified you and declared you once and for all “not guilty” of all your sins, for Christ’s sake. They don’t hold sway over you, your life, or your future anymore! And blessing #4: God always follows through on his plans and promises, so one day he will surely bring you and all his people to be with him in heavenly glory.

We can be thankful in this world, even as we look around and it seems like it’s crashing down around us, because our God has given us spiritual blessings that matter for eternity, and that dwarf any earthly blessings that might just come and go. As Paul says, “*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*” If you’re worrying in these coming days about what the future holds for you – for your health, for your family, for your finances, for your country, for your faith – hear the Word of your LORD that nothing in this world can take you down or take away the love of your Savior. God made sure of that when he saved you from your sins, freed you from the control and manipulation of all the powers of evil in this world, and gave you hope for something so much better to come in paradise one day. Yes, for God’s predestined, called, justified, and one-day-glorified people, our greatest blessing to be thankful for is and always will be Jesus Christ who lived for us, died for us, and rose for us to open the kingdom of heaven for us forever.

You know, around Thanksgiving we tend to think more about the *things* we’re thankful for in this world, from the little things like food and fun and football to the bigger things like family and friends. And that’s all very appropriate. But be thankful for those *things* not as what really makes your life meaningful and purposeful. Be thankful for those things because they’re little reminders to be thankful *to God* for how much he loves you and how well he takes care of you on your road to heaven. (After all, that’s why we call it *Thanksgiving* rather than *Thankshaving*, because it’s not just about the things we *have* – it’s about *giving* thanks to the one who first gave them!) And most of all, be thankful because God has already given you everything – everything you could ever need, everything you could ever want that really matters – through his Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. One day this sinful world and everything in it will pass away, and the harder it gets, the more we can all thank God for that. The meal we eat this Thanksgiving and the football games that we watch will one day be a distant memory. But nothing will separate us from the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, not now, not ever. And more than anything else, *that* is something for us to be eternally thankful for. Amen.