

THANKSGIVING EVE SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota
November 23, 2016

Luke 12:22-31
Genesis 1:1-2:22
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

For the Beauty of the Earth

We had a shirt-sleeve deer season that ended with dropping temperatures and a massive November 18th snow storm. In our area, something close to a foot of heavy, wet snow fell. The whole creation was covered by first rain, then ice and finally snow. The trees in our yard were weighed down by ice and snow that was not about to let go any time soon.

Our little pines and spruce were bent over to the ground with the weight that clung to their limbs. (**Slide 1**) The arbor vitae was just about buried. (**Slide 2**) Several limbs cracked and broke off of our mature white and Norway pines. (**Slide 3**) Their lower branches were already stuck to the ground and I feared could soon be frozen in place for the winter. And another several inches of snow was forecast to fall the next night. I was worried about our precious trees. I couldn't bear to see them damaged further, or even killed.

So I did a crazy thing. I pulled on boots, coat, tassel cap and gloves. Then I scouted up a twelve foot long piece of plastic pvc pipe and I began to go from tree to tree trying to knock the snow off. The little trees seemed frozen in place, even after the snow was shaken off of them. I hoped that a little sunshine might restore them to a perpendicular position. (**Slide 4**) The arbor vitae was the same. (**Slide 5**) On the big trees, I tapped the lower branches, shook them, beat them and tugged on them until they came free from the snow that held them down. (**Slide 6**) The huge limbs began to slowly climb back toward the sky. By the time I was done several hours later, my muscles ached and the pain of arthritis gripped my hands. I was soaking wet from head to toe.

I did a crazy thing, messing with Mother Nature. What difference could I make in the face of winter? It was crazy thinking. But my actions wouldn't have seemed crazy for my dad, Charly Pedersen. I thought of him as I worked. Dad's the one who had our family out planting trees every spring around the edge of our yard and field. He's the one who, in his retirement years, went from tree to tree picking off army worms and drowning them in

a can of oil. I was raised to see trees as one more of the beautiful gifts God has given to this amazing world. Trees shaded our yard, gave us fruit and colored the seasons. Wood from the trees we harvested helped remodel our house, heat our house and pay for the food on our table. Thanks be to God for trees.

Jennifer and I planted our small pines as seedlings and carried buckets of water to give them a good start. The arbor vitae I rescued from neglect in a weed pile and, when our house was remodeled, from the construction crew's heavy equipment. I left a piece of what looked like brush to grow on our beach and now it is a 50 foot tall cottonwood tree. I spared a broken down horse chestnut tree and now it has given life to three new horse chestnut trees. And the cedar that I worked to dig out of the snow is covered with seed pods ready to give new life come spring. (**Slide 7**) In our yard, we have tamarack, jack pine, white pine, Norway pine, spruce, mountain ash, oak, maple, birch, apple, peach, lilac and several other species of trees. I love our trees. So I did a crazy thing and spent a lot of time trying to save them from being broken by the next storm coming down the pike.

So, dear friends in Christ, if I can care so much about some simple trees, a few among so many trees in Minnesota, how much must God, their creator, care about them? How much must God care about the ravens that neither sow nor reap, have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much must God care about the lilies of the field that neither toil nor spin yet are clothed more beautifully than the most powerful king or president. How much God must care about the water, the soil and the air. How much God must care for you and me who God values far more than all of these.

What crazy things has God done to bring this big, old world into existence? What crazy things has God done to create God's amazing human beings? What crazy things God has done to love us to a cross, a grave and then to an empty tomb. What crazy things God has done to say, "**I love you. I forgive you. I will never let you go.**" What crazy things God has done to see you safely to this day, to this place, to God's loving embrace every day.

Picture for a moment the amazing world we live in. Think about the change from night to day, from season to season. Consider the balance of nature and how nature can renew itself after even the worst of disasters. Consider the human body. There is no car, toaster or computer that can function as

amazingly well or last nearly as long as our own bodies. You may be a simple product of nature. Or you may be the work of God's creative and loving hand. If God is behind it all, then we have someone to thank for every day, for every breath, for every morsel of food, for every person we love. If God is behind it all, then we can live our lives in the assurance that we are not alone. That we are loved and cared for. That God will not give up on us.

Jesus, in our Gospel text from Luke tells us:

- Don't worry, God will provide everything that you need.
- Don't worry, God cares for ravens and lilies and God cares even more for you.
- Don't worry, have faith, God will provide.
- Knowing, believing that God will always take care of us, sets us free to live each day in the love and peace and abundance of God.

What do you think? How has God molded and shaped you to be the person that you are this night? How has God tended and nurtured you over the years? How much time has God spent cleaning up your life after this world's storms have blown through? How much bounty has God placed into your life for you to pass along to those around you or to bless the next generation with? How much God must delight in us. How much God must worry over us. How much God must do to love, bless and care for us. How much God must do to earn our love and trust. Do you love and trust God?

I went out and tried to rescue some little and some giant pine trees. And you know, I don't mind being seen as a little crazy if that makes me a little more like my dad. I don't mind being seen as a little crazy if that makes me a little more like our Father, God. My dad and God both are known for doing crazy things to take care of trees and of people.

It is Thanksgiving time here in the United States of America. **Dr. Gerhard Frost**, my beloved seminary professor wrote a piece entitled,

LET US GIVE THANKS

(From "Blessed is the Ordinary," Winston Press, 1980)

Let us give thanks this moment:
for the sturdy fact of God's continuing love,

for the mercies which go before us
and follow after us,
for those free gifts
which cost God so much.

Let us give thanks:
for memory and expectation,
for the good that we have known
and know today in Jesus Christ,
for the Spirit's brooding presence
in our nights and in our days.

Let us give thanks:
for pleasures which comfort
and pains which force our growth
and keep us at the Shepherd's side,
for deep meanings revealed
and mysteries, mercifully concealed,
for the image of God within us,
the capacity to inquire and adore.

Let us give thanks for one another,
for just being together,
for differences which complement and complete,
for gifts which enrich
and disagreements which challenge,
for our oneness in Christ.

Let us give thanks for melody and mirth,
for rhythm and beat,
for the repeated and the common,
for the ever-unfolding,
and for senses with which to respond.

And let us give thanks for Someone to thank.

Dr. Gerhard Frost

Dear friends in Christ, Happy Thanksgiving. And thanks be to God. Amen.