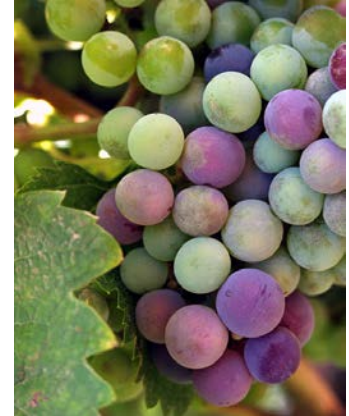


ST. LUKE EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH  
SERMON BY PASTOR ANTHONY E. SCHULTZ  
THANKSGIVING NOVEMBER 23, 2017  
HABAKKUK 3:17-19 (NIV)



**Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.**

People of God-rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

I can't believe it's Thanksgiving Eve/Day! More and more people are simply calling it turkey day – in honor of the some 46 million turkeys that will be eaten today! Just one of the dangers this Thanksgiving is people who try to dip their frozen turkey into a huge tub of boiling oil! There will be on average some 1,400 fires. You can watch some fire department YouTube training videos that show a frozen turkey being lowered into the oil – and then the blinding flash of fire! The deck where the boiling oil is sitting is set on fire – much of the oil leaking between the planks of the deck – so the flames are beneath the deck. Some flames go flying so high – they set the garage and the house roof on fire! They say – whoever they are – there is somewhere in the neighborhood of \$5 million in damage done by frozen turkeys in boiling oil! And that's not the greatest danger. Again the greatest danger is spiritual. The danger that from now until New Year's Day we will be so caught up in all the "things and stuff" to do – we lose sight of what the "holidays" are supposed to be about! Thanksgiving is about giving thanks to our Heavenly Father – not just for all that "daily bread" implies – but giving thanks for faith, forgiveness, an incorruptible inheritance in Heaven. Christmas is not about decorations which are going up all around our subdivision. There's nothing wrong with colored lights – all around the eaves of your home – don't misunderstand. But the

Christ-child is the reason for Christmas. Advent is about prepare your heart for Jesus' second coming with all his holy angels to take us home to Heaven. New Year's is about looking back on all God's blessings and looking ahead – to a new year of grace! Today God's Word encourages us:

**Give Thanks To the LORD!**

- I. **Thank the LORD in difficult times**
- II. **Thank the LORD in abundant times.**

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on is part of the scroll of the prophet Habakkuk! If the first person you bumped into in Heaven – a little grandpa – with a salt and pepper beard – real long--wearing a burgundy gown – carrying a shepherd's staff – and he introduced himself as Habakkuk – yes, by the grace of God – *thee* Habakkuk. And he asked you what part of his scroll did you like best – what would you say? Would you say, "You know, I just picked up the People's Bible Commentary on Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah was written by the grace of God – by Prof. Westendorf! If you had any questions you could speak to him directly. How cool is that?

Jonah – everybody – including unbelievers know who Jonah was. Jonah – and the whale – they all say. You might say, "Jonah and the great fish" – and so? Jonah was called by the LORD to preach God's Word in that great and terrible city of Nineveh. Jonah hated the people of Nineveh – the way some people today hate the people of North Korea – or the Russians or the Chinese. And Jonah was afraid – afraid if he preached the law to the people of Nineveh they would repent in sack cloth and ashes – and the LORD would have mercy on them and they would all be spared and saved! So Jonah headed for the Rock of Gibraltar – instead of Nineveh. The great fish swallowed Jonah and three days later *urped* him up on the shore – and Jonah went to Nineveh. Sure enough – Jonah preached and taught – the people listened and by the power of the Holy Spirit repented and believed! And God had mercy on them. Jonah meanwhile sat on a great hillside – just outside Nineveh – *hope against hope* – that the LORD would send down fire and brimstone on Nineveh. The sun baked Jonah. He complained. The LORD made a vine/plant – perhaps a Castor-bean plant to grow up overnight – massive leafs to give Jonah shade/relief.

Jonah was grateful. A worm came and killed the plant. Jonah was in despair. The LORD said to Jonah, **"You have been concerned about this vine though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"** The end! Nahum – too – Nahum whose name means *full of consolation* – preached a fierce law to the people of Nineveh – and they did not listen – and destruction came crashing down on them. Nahum – then comes Habakkuk!

Habakkuk was a Prophet in Judah – the southern Kingdom – Jerusalem and Bethlehem and so? Jerusalem was where the Temple was – where the Palace was. God's Word does not tell us much about Habakkuk. His name means "embrace" – that is "one who dearly loves". Pastor Embrace – Pastor Hugs – *I like that!* We don't know for sure exactly when Habakkuk preached God's Word – but if you really study ancient history – and if you really think about it – you can have a pretty good idea. When we went to Northwestern College we studied lots of ancient history. We read about the Assyrian Empire. It was a power unequalled from 2,500 years before Jesus was born until 612 years before baby Jesus was born.



Nabopolasser and the New Babylonians – some call them the Chaldeans and their friends the Medes crushed the Assyrians at Nineveh and then again at Haran. Nabopolasser's son Nebuchadnezzar and his army went south and crushed the army of the Egyptians. Babylon reigned supreme. Very likely Habakkuk preached God's Word – just a little bit before it was clear to anybody that Babylon was about to reign supreme. Who saw that coming? People didn't see it. The LORD did. And the LORD made it happen. So...before it happened the LORD announced his plan – through his Prophet Hugs.

There is literary style to the short scroll of the Prophet Habakkuk. **The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.** An oracle is a message – an insight – very literally it is **a burden**. It weighed on Habakkuk – this problem that was painfully difficult to understand! Habakkuk asked –

questioned – to be blunt – the Holy Spirit inspired Habakkuk to bring two **complaints** before his Heavenly Father. Habakkuk complained – he wondered out loud – and the LORD answered. **How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me, there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. Violence and injustice!** To watch the news you would think these were new problems! They are not! Imagine the ♥ ache and ♥ break Adam and Eve must have felt that their bite of forbidden fruit in Eden had led to this – their son Cain had murdered his brother Abel! Have you read your Bible lately? Genesis – just before the flood? 6:11f **Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.** God would use the Babylonians to crush those empires guilty of gross violence. Those whose strength became their god – small “g” would be swept away by God’s ultimate forever justice! Instead of crying out against the violence of others – let us consider our own anger and frustration. Our own anger and upset – that lashes out against spouse and children – against co-workers and bosses and government. Consider our own anger issues. And then in complete repentance: remember the violence Jesus endured – tied up, slapped, crowned with thorns, punched and scourged and finally crucified – all to pay for our corruption – all our violence – all our sin!

Habakkuk’s second complaint? **O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment...why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?** People are like fish and the wicked pull us up with sharp hooks! We get caught in the net! Why do the wicked prosper? This bothered wise King Solomon, too! Why do we see pudgy people Sunday afternoons being paid literally tens of millions of dollars to play a children’s game – with a baby momma in every town their team plays –

punching girlfriends unconscious – shooting gangster friends – and disrespecting our flag – while hard working people struggle! Why are so many elected officials arrogant – dishonest – acting as if they are above the law? Again the LORD answered, **“See, he – that is the godless wicked is puffed up, his desires are not upright – but the righteous will live by his faith.”** In this world – in this time – the wicked only *seem* to prosper. In the end – we who are *declared not guilty* will live by grace through faith in Heaven. The wicked will only know the forever flames of hell. When you remember we are strangers here heaven is our home – then and only then-- **Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.** Even if you can’t go to Uncle Marty and Aunt Kathleen’s. Even if there is no turkey and stuffing today – no turkey sandwiches with chips and refrigerated Kosher dill pickles. Even if there is no turkey noodle casserole Friday noon – *still* we give thanks – not just a Thursday noon in November but every day. We thank Jesus for the Gospel of forgiveness for all our sins because Jesus died and rose again to redeem us!

**The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. The Sovereign Lord is my strength...** *He is my strength!* The Apostle Paul understood this very well. He wrote to the Corinthians **Therefore, to keep me from becoming arrogant due to the extraordinary nature of these revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me, so that I would not become arrogant.** <sup>8</sup> **Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that he would take it away from me. And he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness.”** **Therefore I will be glad to boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may shelter me. That is why I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For whenever I am weak, then am I strong.** I never tell people to be strong! I never tell people don’t cry! I never tell people then need to be tougher! I always tell then Jesus is your strength. He holds you in his nail marked hands. He will never leave you. He will never forsake you! Jesus is strong in you and for you. For this too we say **Thank you, Jesus! Amen!**

To God alone all glory!

*Rev. Anthony E. Schultz*