



## THANKSGIVING

**Sunday, November 20, 2011 or Thursday, November 24, 2011**

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The unit you are viewing, Thanksgiving, is a compact unit. This means that it does not have a supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided scriptural text(s) that we suggest for this moment on the calendar along with a sermonic outline, suggested links, books, articles, songs, and videos. For additional information, see Thanksgiving in the archives of the Lectionary for 2008, 2009, and 2010. 2011 is the first year that the African American Lectionary has posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

### **I. Description of the Liturgical Moment**

Lester McCorn wrote in the 2008 Thanksgiving Lectionary commentary:

The Thanksgiving holiday is a distinctly American celebration that has been adapted in the African American religious tradition. More than an historical event

to be commemorated on the calendar, the act of “Thanksgiving” is an organic, authentic, and integral theme of African American worship. Provoked expressions of “thank you” are common in the various call-and-response, song, offering, proclamation, and prayer and praise statements of worship in the black church. Therefore, a Thanksgiving Service, as a devoted time of reflection, remembrance, and renewal of the faith, is a customary occasion in many black churches, observed on the corresponding date of the fourth Thursday in November.

The distinction between the American national holiday and the African American religious celebration can be described as the nuanced differences between commemoration and culmination. Thanksgiving serves as the dynamic climax of a journey, and not a static commemorative event. It is celebrated near the end of a calendar year and directly before the season of Christmas/Advent (technically the beginning of the Christian Calendar). The journey is at once ending and beginning. We give thanks for where the Lord has brought us from, while simultaneously giving compulsory “anticipatory thanks” for what lies ahead. For African American worship, thanksgiving and praise go hand-in-hand.

John Guns wrote for the Thanksgiving commentary in 2009:

Foundational to the Christian experience is the act of thanksgiving. Our level of thanksgiving often defines who we are and what we are called to express daily in concrete ways. Couple that with the Thanksgiving holiday and, potentially, you have a powerful worship experience that blends the best of the Christian faith. Thanksgiving, though not a distinctly Christian holiday, at least in America, is still important. Throughout the United States, churches and families gather to express their appreciation to God for all that God has done. It is one of the moments of the year where worship is both easier for, and expected by, all who attend church services. The premise being, of course, that all of us have something for which we can be thankful.

Within the African American faith community, Thanksgiving is both a holiday and an ongoing act that speaks of our intense passion and love for God who has, throughout our tumultuous journey in this country, brought us “a mighty long way.” Thanksgiving allows us to gather as family and celebrate the many “marvelous acts” of God. As the Christian church gathers to celebrate Thanksgiving, it is a great time to reflect upon the suffering and challenges that have arisen throughout the year and how God has, through Jesus Christ, enabled us not only to endure but also to grow.

With this material as our backdrop we provide a sermonic outline for Thanksgiving 2011.

## **II. Thanksgiving: Sermonic Outline**

### **A. Sermonic Focus Text(s): Psalm 107:1-3 (New Revised Standard Version)**

(v. 1) O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. (v. 2) Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble (v. 3) and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

## **B. Possible Title(s)**

- i. Say So
- ii. I Have Something to Shout About
- iii. Silent No More

## **C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry**

In Psalm 107:2, the Hebrew word that means “redeem” is *ga'al*. It concerns the way or process in which people, property, and prominence are restored to a clan, family, or group. The *go'el* is the person who is the redeemer, the individual who is designated to recover what was lost. This process could possibly cost the redeemer considerable resources to complete the transaction. The redemptive action in the text by God is not an effortless process. On the contrary, God is an active and willing participant in the redemption of God’s people from exile.

## **III. Introduction**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. found himself in the midst of a civil rights struggle that seemed to also have cosmic repercussions. The callous and crippling racism that has afflicted our country from its inception had almost strangled the moral voice of the religious leadership of America. As King sat in the Birmingham jail, he penned a letter that addressed the silence of black and white clergy. Their indifference and silence was bewildering.

With the backdrop of such deafening silence from religious people—those who have every reason to raise their voices for such a divine and righteous cause like justice—King makes one of the most incisive quotes in recent memory: “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that really matter.” King’s words condemn those who believe they are alive while they are silent about the things that are really important.

King’s words are not only for those who are silent about the social issues of the day but they are also for Christians who are silent about what they should be vocal about—for purposes of this unit, the goodness of God. Many Christians who claim to be alive are actually on the verge of a spiritual death because they have stopped being thankful for God’s blessings, stopped being vocal about what God has done for them, and are silent about the awesome power of our living and powerful God. Our lips are our witness about

our experiences and expectations. Our mouths confirm or deny that we are thankful for God's work in our lives and our world.

Dr. King encourages us to say so! Not only to say what is right and just but to say we are thankful for what God has done! If God has been good say so! If God has made a way out of no way, we have the obligation, mandate, and just cause to say so!

#### **IV. Moves/Points**

##### **Move/Point One** – God's Character (v. 1a)

- a. God's nature and actions are rooted in goodness;
- b. Our thankfulness should be grounded in who God is and not what happens to us; and
- c. Being thankful for God's goodness is a command not an option.

##### **Move/Point Two** – God's Consistency (v. 1b)

- a. God's love will not end;
- b. God's consistency toward us is not based in our actions; and
- c. God's steadfast love (mercy) is consistent because our need for it is consistent.

##### **Move/Point Three** – God's Commerce (vv. 2 and 3)

- a. Our redemption cost God something;
- b. God redeemed us from trouble; and
- c. God redeemed us from alienation.

#### **V. Celebration**

A seven-year old Maya Angelou found herself in a place where she would not speak. Her mother's boyfriend had raped her. The man was placed in jail for one day and night. The next day, she found out the man was murdered. So horrified by her fear that her voice could kill, Maya stopped talking. Although she stopped talking, she eventually fell in love with poetry. Mrs. Flowers, a woman who introduced poetry to her told her, "You won't love it until you speak it." Maya, thankful for the gift of poetry, secluded herself and because she was thankful for poetry began to speak again. As they saying goes, the rest is history.

Many of us have spent too much time in silence, allowing the fears and pains of life to muzzle our voice. Like Maya, when we find something we love, something we are

thankful for, we should say so. I dare each one of us to think about one thing we are thankful for and SAY SO!

If God has made a way, SAY SO!  
If God has opened doors, SAY SO!  
If God has been a friend when you were friendless, SAY SO!  
If God has held your family together, SAY SO!  
If God has provided for you, SAY SO!  
If God has kept you sane, SAY SO!  
If God has blessed you in spite of you, SAY SO!

## **VI. Illustration(s)**

### The Lost Art of Thankfulness

Thankfulness seems to be a lost art today. Warren Wiersby illustrated this problem in his commentary on Colossians. He told about a ministerial student in Evanston, Illinois, who was part of a life-saving squad. In 1860, a ship went aground on the shore of Lake Michigan near Evanston, and Edward Spencer waded again and again into the frigid waters to rescue 17 passengers. In the process, his health was permanently damaged. Some years later at his funeral, it was noted that not one of the people he rescued ever thanked him.

—*Our Daily Bread*, February 20, 1994

### Ungratefulness and Dogs

In his book Folk Psalms of Faith, Ray Stedman tells of an experience H.A. Ironside had in a crowded restaurant:

Just as Ironside was about to begin his meal, a man approached and asked if he could join him. Ironside invited him to have a seat. Then, as was his custom, Ironside bowed his head in prayer. When he opened his eyes, the other man asked, “Do you have a headache?” Ironside replied, “No, I don’t.” The other man asked, “Well, is there something wrong with your food?” Ironside replied, “No, I was simply thanking God as I always do before I eat.”

The man said, “Oh, you’re one of those, are you? Well, I want you to know I never give thanks. I earn my money by the sweat of my brow and I don’t have to give thanks to anybody when I eat. I just start right in!”

Ironside said, “Yes, you’re just like my dog. That’s what he does too!”

—Ray Stedman, Folk Psalms of Faith

See the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary for additional illustrations that you may wish to use in presenting a sermon for this moment on the liturgical calendar.

## **VII. Sounds, Sights, and Colors in This Passage**

**Sounds:** People rejoicing; the audible stories of God’s redemptive power; the commotion of people praising and thanking God;

**Sights:** People in the temple with their hands raised and eyes lifted; the commotion of people seeing people gathered in small pockets in fellowship; and

**Colors:** A myriad of vibrant colors in the clothing of the people; and deep purple representing royalty.

## **VIII. Songs to Use to Accompany This Sermon**

### **A. Hymns(s)**

- I Will Bless Thee. O Lord. By Esther Watanabe
- I Thank You, Jesus. By Kenneth Morris

### **B. Well-Known Song(s)**

- Thank You Lord for All You’ve Done for Me. By Walter Hawkins  
YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhBh-gMappE>
- Be Grateful. By Lashun Pace
- All These Blessings. By David Curry
- Miracles & Blessings. By Gaye Arbuckle
- For Every Mountain. By Kurt Carr  
YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUaGoS2LW5g>

### **C. Spiritual**

- How I Got Over. Negro Spiritual

### **D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2000–2010)**

- Grateful. By Hezekiah Walker
- Thank You. By Latoya and Sasha Vinson

### **E. Liturgical Dance Music**

- Alabaster Box. By CeCe Winans

- Thank You. By Richard Smallwood

#### **F. Songs for Congregational Singing or Choirs**

- Count Your Blessings. By Johnson Oatman. Tune by Edwin O. Excell
- Give Thanks. Text and Tune by Henry Smith
- The Lord Is Blessing Me Right Now. By Nolan Williams Jr.
- This Day. By Edwin Hawkins
- I Remember. By Frederick Burchell and Craig Watkins. Music by Frederick Burchell and Kyle Lovett

#### **G. Song or Instrumental for the Period of Prayer**

- Thank You, Lord. By Seth Sykes and Bessie Sykes

#### **H. Sermonic Selection**

- Thanks Be to God. By Noble Cain. For SATB choir and accompaniment
- Lord I'm So Grateful. By Fernando G. Allen
- Bless the Lord. By Fernando G. Allen
- If Not for Your Grace. By Israel Houghton

#### **I. Invitational Song or Instrumental**

- Thank You, Lord. Traditional

#### **J. Benediction Sung, Spoken, or Instrumental**

- Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow. By Isaac Watts. Arr. by Roberta Martin
- Let All the People Praise Thee. By C. H. Morris

## **Scriptural Benediction**

- Philippians 4:4-7
- Philippians 4:19-20

## **Choral Benediction**

- Thank You. By Walter Hawkins

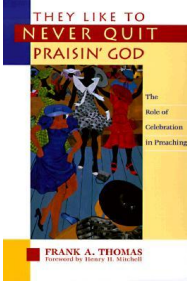
You can review past Lectionary worship units for Thanksgiving to find additional songs and suggestions for planning a worship service for this liturgical moment.

## **IX. Videos, Audio, and/or Other Media**

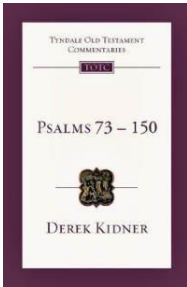
- A sermon by Bishop G. E. Patterson, “David’s Day of Thanksgiving.” Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOQzct-8Mo4&feature=related>
- A Thanksgiving sermon from 1831 given by AME Preacher Benjamin Arnett. Online location: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/thanksgiving/celebration.html>
- A Thanksgiving Sermon. See an Annotated edition of a January 1, 1808 sermon by Absalom Jones, of the St. Thomas African Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, commemorating the end of legal importation of slaves into the United States. Digitized by the Antislavery Literature Project. Online location: <http://antislavery.eserver.org/religious/absalomjones>
- A sermon by Pastor Noel Jones, “Moving from Praise to Thanksgiving.” Online location:  
Part 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTM3qH3GEYY>  
Part 2:  
[http://www.zeeton.com/VisionSphere/video/Youtube/Bishop\\_Noel\\_Jones/D8UCBU3zwGo.html](http://www.zeeton.com/VisionSphere/video/Youtube/Bishop_Noel_Jones/D8UCBU3zwGo.html)  
Part 3: <http://vodpod.com/watch/5164233-bishop-noel-jones-moving-from-praise-to-thanksgiving-pt-3>  
Part 4: <http://vodpod.com/watch/5164234-bishop-noel-jones-moving-from-praise-to-thanksgiving-pt-4>  
Part 5: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INFZyShEIy4&feature=related>

## **X. Books to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to Thanksgiving**





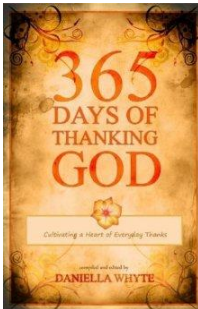
Thomas, Frank. They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997.



Kidner, Derek. Psalm 73–150. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary. London: InterVarsity Press, 1973.



Watson, Kim. The Extra-Thankful Thanksgiving. New York, NY: Simon Spotlight/Nickelodeon, 2001.



Whyte, Daniella. 365 Days of Thanking God: Cultivating a Heart of Everyday Thanks. Joshua, TX: Torch Legacy Publications, 2010.

## XI. Links to Helpful Websites for Thanksgiving and Ideas

- A collection of Thanksgiving Lessons for Children's Church. Online location: <http://ministry-to-children.com/thanksgiving-lesson/>
- A collection of religious Thanksgiving poems. Online location: <http://www.thanksgivingworld.com/thanksgiving-poetry/religious.html>
- A collection of Thanksgiving Prayers. Online location: <http://www.poemsource.com/thanksgiving-prayers.html>

- 10 Simple Thanksgiving ideas to help you and your family express thanks to God on Thanksgiving Day. Online location:  
<http://christianity.about.com/od/thanksgiving/p/creativethanksg.htm>

## **XII. Notes for Select Songs**

### **A. Hymns(s)**

- I Will Bless Thee. O Lord. By Esther Watanabe  
Location:  
African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #530
- I Thank You, Jesus. By Kenneth Morris  
Location:  
African American Heritage Hymnal. #532

### **B. Well-Known Song(s)**

- Thank You Lord for All You've Done for Me. By Walter Hawkins  
Location:  
Love Alive 4. Jackson, MS: Malaco Records, 1990.
- Be Grateful. By Lashun Pace  
Location:  
Just Because God Said It. Jackson, MS. Label: Savoy, 1998.
- All These Blessings. By David Curry  
Location:  
The Mississippi Children's Choir. Children of The King. Jackson, MS: Malaco 1992.
- Miracles & Blessings. By Gaye Arbuckle  
Location:  
Miracles & Blessings. Dallas, TX: B&G Records, 1996.
- For Every Mountain. By Kurt Carr  
Location:  
Kurt Carr and the Kurt Carr Singers. Praise and Worship: The Very Best of Praise and Worship. New York, NY: Verity/Legacy, 2006.

### **C. Spiritual**

- How I Got Over. Negro Spiritual

#### **D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2000–2010)**

- Grateful. By Hezekiah Walker  
Location:  
20/85 The Experience. New York, NY: Verity Records, 2005.
- Thank You. By Latoya and Sasha Vinson  
Location:  
V3. Brentwood, TN: EMI Gospel, 2006.

#### **E. Liturgical Dance Music**

- Alabaster Box. By CeCe Winans  
Location:  
Alabaster Box. Nashville, TN: Sparrow Records, 2008.
- Thank You. By Richard Smallwood  
Location:  
Praise & Worship. New York, NY: Verity, 2003.

#### **F. Songs for Congregational Singing or Choirs**

- Count Your Blessings. By Johnson Oatman. Tune by Edwin O. Excell  
Location:  
African American Heritage Hymnal. #533
- Give Thanks. Text and Tune by Henry Smith  
Location:  
Zion Still Sings for Every Generation. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007.  
#127
- The Lord Is Blessing Me Right Now. By Nolan Williams Jr.  
Location:  
Zion Still Sings. #125
- This Day. By Edwin Hawkins  
Location:  
African American Heritage Hymnal. #443

- I Remember. By Frederick Burchell and Craig Watkins. Music by Frederick Burchell and Kyle Lovett  
Location:  
Zion Still Sings. #126

### **G. Song or Instrumental for the Period of Prayer**

- Thank You, Lord. By Seth Sykes and Bessie Sykes  
Location:  
African American Heritage Hymnal. #536

National Baptist Publishing Board. The New National Baptist Hymnal. Nashville, TN: National Baptist Pub. Board, 1981. #464

Church of God in Christ. Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. Memphis, TN: Church of God in Christ Pub. Board in association with the Benson Co., 1982. #474

### **H. Sermonic Selection**

- Thanks Be to God. By Noble Cain. For SATB choir and accompaniment  
Location:  
Published by Boosey & Hawkes  
Online location: [www.sheetmusicplus.com](http://www.sheetmusicplus.com)
- Lord I'm So Grateful. By Fernando G. Allen  
Location:  
Bless the Lord. Baltimore, MD: Ice Records, 2004.
- Bless the Lord. By Fernando G. Allen  
Location:  
Bless The Lord. Baltimore, MD: Ice Records, 2004.
- If Not for Your Grace. By Israel Houghton  
Location:  
Israel & New Breed. A Deeper Level Live. New York, NY: Sony, 2007.

### **I. Invitational Song or Instrumental**

- Thank You, Lord. Traditional  
Location:

African American Heritage Hymnal. #531

Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 1987. #206

Cleveland, J. Jefferson, and Verolga Nix. Songs of Zion. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981. #228

### **J. Benediction Sung, Spoken, or Instrumental**

- Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow. By Isaac Watts. Arr. by Roberta Martin

Location:

African American Heritage Hymnal. #650

The New National Baptist Hymnal. #529

- Let All the People Praise Thee. By C. H. Morris

Location:

African Methodist Episcopal Hymnal. Nashville, TN: AME Publishing House, 1998. #58

Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal. #83

The New National Baptist Hymnal. #28

Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. #14

### **Scriptural Benediction**

- Philippians 4:4-7
- Philippians 4:19-20

### **Choral Benediction**

- Thank You. By Walter Hawkins

Location:

Love Alive 4. Jackson, MS: Malaco Records, 1990.