

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE ON SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 17,
2017 BY THE REVEREND STUART LANGSHAW, LOCUM TENENS.**

TWELFTH SERMON IN THE SERIES ABOUT HOLY COMMUNION

It has been said that the two most under-used words in the English language are these – “Thank you.” Just last weekend there was an article published in the paper about too many modern teenagers who live with an attitude of their rights and of privilege. For too many of them the expression “Thank you” is foreign. I don’t know if you remember a TV commercial from years ago for Maxwell House instant coffee where one of the actors says, “Not a word of thanks, Reggie ... not a word.”

In this twelfth sermon in our series about the Holy Communion service, we come to the Thanksgiving Prayer, where there are many words of thanks. We’ll have a look at a few details in a while.

Our Thanksgiving Prayer is a special form of prayer, based on the Jewish Berakah prayer form. That word “Berakah” is an Anglicised way of pronouncing the Hebrew word “brachkcha” that means “Blessed.” (ברכה) Berakah prayers were Jewish table prayers of blessing, praising and thanking. They had great importance on Jewish holy feasts such as Passover. At the beginning of the meal, the head of the family spoke the Berakah, saying, “Blessed are you, Lord God, king of the world, who has brought bread from heaven.” The unleavened bread was then broken and given to all those present. Various courses of the Passover meal followed, with special foods and prayers – at Passover, praising God for granting the Hebrews freedom from slavery in Egypt.

The first section of the four sections of our Thanksgiving Prayer thanks and blesses God for what God has done for *us*.

Thanksgiving Prayer 1 in our Prayer Book that we shall use this morning says, “We give you **thanks and praise** for our Saviour Jesus Christ ...” Thanksgiving Prayer 2 says “It is right to **praise you**, faithful God, always and everywhere ...” The same pattern is followed in the other Thanksgiving Prayers we use as Australian Anglicans. And just as in the Jewish Berakah prayer, we thank and praise and bless God for what God has done for us. This morning’s Thanksgiving Prayer 1 thanks God for Jesus – born of Mary, living as one of us, obtaining an eternal deliverance for his people by Jesus’ death and resurrection. Thanksgiving Prayers 2 and 4 thank God for creation and for God’s faithfulness to us.

So Sunday by Sunday our attention is drawn to God’s actions for us – very “big-picture” things. However, day by day, we ought to give our attention to what God has done for us individually and privately – the “small-picture” stuff. For some of us it would be God’s blessings to us in our relationships with family and friends; for others it would be the blessing of appreciation of music; and for others it would be God’s blessings to us in health and well-being. In our own prayer lives we should have our own Berakah prayers – expressing our thanks to God for what we have, even if it’s not much. Thanking God for what we have, and not comparing our situation with other people’s situation. Someone said that comparison is the thief of joy. Let us be people who express our thanks to God – and to others – for the things we receive in our lives day by day.

This first section of our Prayer in the Communion Service ends with a great outpouring of praise – the “Tersanctus” as it’s called in Latin or the “Trisagion” in Greek. **Holy, holy,**

holy ... Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of he lord. Hosanna in the highest." The people who wrote the Prayer Book looked for a Bible expression of praise, and used this expression that the crowds used on Palm Sunday – a great outburst of praise from Psalm 118. As we say or sing these words Sunday by Sunday we are looking back to all that God has done for us. "Blessed be God for ever". It would be good if there was a line drawn across the page in our Prayer Book under "Hosanna in the highest." That outpouring of praise refers to everything that has gone before it in the Thanksgiving Prayer – Hosanna to God for all that God has done for us in Jesus, and in creation.

The second section of the four sections of our Thanksgiving Prayer is the telling again of the institution of the Holy Communion by Jesus on the night before he was arrested, tried and crucified. We remind ourselves again and again of the words and actions of our Lord Jesus, as he re-told the facts of the Passover, but refocused it on his self-offering and death for us all. The bread and the wine are set apart in our service, just as Jesus set them apart in that Passover. Familiar words ... familiar actions ... but enormously significant for us who love and follow and serve Jesus Christ. We do become used to these words, more's the pity. We must do whatever we can to keep them fresh and new and vibrant and ringing with meaning in our minds *every time* we hear them. In each of our Thanksgiving Prayers (except Thanksgiving 2) is that enormously significant, two-word phrase ... **"for you."** *"this is my body given ... for you ... this is my blood of the new covenant shed ... for you ..."* This is no spectator event that we are re-telling. This is no safe, arm's-length academic exercise that we are re-telling. You and I are personally and intimately involved in what's going on here ... Jesus did this, Jesus said this, Jesus lived this and Jesus died this ... **for you.**

The third section of our Thanksgiving Prayer is made up of prayers for ourselves. "Renew us ... unite us ... bring us with all your people ... " are the words we shall use today. In Thanksgiving Prayer 2 we pray, " ... send your Holy Spirit upon us and our celebration." Thanksgiving Prayer 3 prays that we may be one body in Christ ... that we may serve God in unity and peace as does Thanksgiving Prayer 4. The Holy Communion has consequences for the way we live and work. Again, it's not a spectator sport that leaves us unaffected. The Holy Communion has an affect upon our Christian living and working. As we leave the service, we take with us this weekly energy to be united with our fellow worshippers, to be united with our families and friends, to serve others, and to serve the world in unity and peace. We can't receive the Holy Communion with dispassion and with objectivity. We must receive the Holy Communion with passion and subjectivity, taking its power and influence into every part of our lives.

The fourth section of the Thanksgiving Prayer is the great doxology at the end – "Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen." At the 9.30 sung service I really like the way that Chris Chataway composed the music for this doxology as a great fanfare – a great whoosh and fizz of praise. At our 8 am service I like the way that this doxology is said with energy and determination and whoosh and fizz.

Thanks be to God - God has done so much for us. **"Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever."** In the new use of the ancient Jewish ceremony of setting apart bread and wine Jesus has made these symbols significant for us his followers. **"Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever."** God gives us grace and strength to renew us, to unite us, to bring us with all his people

into the joy of his kingdom, to serve him. **“Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever.”**

The Berakah Thanksgiving Prayer – blessing God for all God has done for us; blessing God for all we receive through the symbols of bread and wine; blessing God for the life we now live to God’s glory and the good of others; That’s the Thanksgiving Prayer – may we also have thanksgiving lives.