

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Do these words sound familiar to you? “[S]ome things that should not have been forgotten were lost. History became legend. Legend became myth. And for two and a half thousand years, the ring passed out of all knowledge.” If you know the Lord of the Rings movies, you know these words were spoken in the opening scenes of the first movie. The script writers took the words out of the wizard Gandalf’s mouth and put them into high elf Galadriel’s. Things were forgotten; they passed out of knowledge. “History became legend. Legend became myth.”

I think there’s a connection with our Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving has to do with remembering, and remembering has to do with telling the story — with the narrative, as it’s often said today. And setting the narrative is powerful.

That’s what Moses was doing there in the wilderness, just across the Jordan from the Promised Land. He was reminding Israel of their story. He told them of their rescue: “[I]t is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut. 7:8). He reminded them of the Law that the LORD gave at Horeb, again with a nod to the Exodus: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. ... You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain ... Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy ...” (Deut. 5:6-7, 11-12). And not only did the LORD their God save them, but He also led them forty years in the wilderness, feeding them with manna, giving them “clothing [that] did not wear out” and feet that “did not swell.”

And finally through Moses, the LORD promised them even more: “a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. And you shall eat and be full” Surely, the only response to Israel’s story is to “bless the LORD ... and forget not all his benefits” (Ps. 103:2). So Israel was called to do — and so are we, for we are their spiritual descendants.

But, of course, many scholars today dismiss the Exodus story “as nothing more than a **pious myth**’ created by the Judean priesthood of the seventh to third centuries BC in order to provide a **mythical past** for the Jewish people” (“The Exodus: Myth or History?” in Popular Archaeology, March 16, 2015). They seek to steal away the events, without which we are left with no rationale for giving thanks. But we won’t let them steal them; we’ll keep on remembering and telling the story.

Historians do the same thing with regard to our American story. You know the story of Thanksgiving. You've heard it since your youth. Our LSUS youth still hear the story at Thanksgiving time, and I'm sure most could tell it to you: about the Pilgrims coming over from England on the Mayflower, landing at Plymouth Rock in 1620; about Squanto and the aid they received from the Wampanoag Indians that helped the struggling settlers survive in the New World; about the three-day harvest festival with Pilgrims and Native Americans gathering together to give thanks at the acclaimed "first Thanksgiving." This story fills us with admiration at their resiliency and their piety in the face of their suffering.

Yet, many want to call this, too, but myth. Consider this quote from an article in the Christian Science Monitor about "The first Thanksgiving": "The trouble is, **almost everything we've been taught** about the first Thanksgiving in 1621 **is a myth**" (CSMonitor.com, November 27, 2002).

But if you read the rest of the article, you find out that the "almost everything we've been taught" that's wrong is a bunch of nitpicking. For example, "In the culture of the Wampanoag Indians, who inhabited the area around Cape Cod, 'thanksgiving' was an everyday activity." Well, ok. And I'm sure it was for the Christians, too. It is for us still, and we join the rest of the country today for a special Thanksgiving, as they surely did.

For example, "Neither the English people nor the native people in 1621 knew they were having the first Thanksgiving." That's trivially obvious, and who is it exactly that has taught they thought they were starting a National Holiday?

For example, we're told that what they ate at their feast was different than ours. They probably didn't have turkey or sweet potatoes, cranberries or pumpkin pie. But again, who is it that has taught what they ate is an important detail of the story of the first Thanksgiving? What is wrong with these people? So what? I say to all of these critiques. Just be quiet. Let us remember these settlers on Thanksgiving. Let us tell the story and give thanks for their part in settling our great country.

Of course, we all have our own stories, our own family remembrances of the blessings of God in our lives, our own very personal reasons to give thanks to God. Maybe you tell some of those stories around your Thanksgiving table and give thanks. Certainly, as Christians, we consider it our duty to do so as we remember God's gifts — like His First Article gifts as Luther teaches: "He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life." In addition to that, "He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil." And

He doesn't do it because of "any merit or worthiness in me," but "only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy." And Luther concludes this explanation: "For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him" (Small Catechism, Apostles' Creed, Explanation to the First Article).

And if you don't think Luther covered it in that list, he gives a fuller list in his explanation to the Fourth Petition of the Lord's prayer, dealing with daily bread. "What is meant by daily bread?" He says it's "everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body" and, in addition to the previous list, it includes "money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors." And if even that list isn't long enough for you, he concludes it with "and the like" (Small Catechism, Apostles' Lord's Prayer, Explanation to the Fourth Petition). And for this daily bread, too, we Christians are called to realize that God is the giver and to give thanks. It's part of our Christian stories.

But our thanksgiving surely doesn't cover just First Article gifts. Surely the Second Article gifts are more significant, those gifts found in Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended. We tell His story week in and week out, that we might bless the Lord in Christ and forget not His benefits — benefits like our redemption, our justification, the forgiveness of our sins, our salvation, life everlasting.

And surely also the Third Article gifts are significant to us, the grace given us by the Holy Spirit that calls us to faith in Christ, that sanctifies us and keeps us in this faith whereby we receive all of Christ's saving goodness. The Holy Spirit's story is that of the storyteller, giving us the words to tell the story of Christ, that we might hear, believe, and give thanks. And we have His assurance through the apostle: these are not "*cleverly devised myths*"; they're not legend, but they are facts — history, that is His story — brought to the apostles' remembrance "*as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Pet. 1:16, 21) for which we are eternally grateful ...

because for us Christians, not just on this Thanksgiving Day but daily, none of this has passed from history to legend to myth. We do not forget our stories. We remember them; we preach them; that is, we keep on telling the blessed stories of our creation, redemption, and sanctification. We give thanks to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for making our stories a part of His story of love and compassion for us sinners, for which we say: Oh, give "*thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever*" (Ps. 136:1).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.