

Thanksgiving Reflections: Inspired by Martin Rinkart

Are you struggling to be thankful as you come to the end of a tough year? Then the story of Martin Rinkart will lift your heart.

Rinkart was a Lutheran pastor who ministered in Eilenburg, Saxony during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). This devastating conflict ravaged entire regions, caused unrelenting famine and bankrupted most of the combatant powers. Malnutrition and pandemic threatened almost all of Europe.

Eilenburg saw a steady stream of refugees pour into the city for three decades, overwhelming the city's meager resources. Eight hundred homes in Eilenburg were destroyed in the fighting. The pastors of the city were under enormous strain, conducting multiple funerals daily while trying to minister to survivors.

The Year of the Great Pestilence (1637) saw every pastor in the city except Rinkart succumb to the horrific conditions. As the sole surviving clergyman in Eilenburg, it fell upon Rinkart to conduct funeral services for up to 50 people per day. In May of that terrible year, Rinkart's own wife died.

Rinkart lived in a world palled by death and despair. Yet his faith in Christ held firm. He did not give in to bitterness. Even after living through three hellish decades he never lost his confidence in the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Pastor Rinkart could identify with Job. After losing his family, his health, his money and his position in society, Job still declared His trust in God: "Even if He kills me, I will hope in Him" (Job 13:15, HCSB). Martin Rinkart profoundly understood Jeremiah's unflinching faith. Looking on a scene of

collapsed hopes and a privileged nation that now lay pillaged, Jeremiah still declared, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-24, ESV).

How did Pastor Rinkart keep his faith and his sanity? He refused to be defined by his circumstances. He determined to focus, not on his circumstances, but on the unchanging character of a merciful God. If we drop anchor on any "rock" that can potentially be removed, we will be insecure and prone to self-debilitating bitterness. But if we anchor on the Rock of Christ Jesus, our moorings will hold fast (see Matt. 7:24-27).

Set against the bleak backdrop of a protracted war, economic collapse, and his own city's devastation, Martin Rinkart penned these words for his children as a prayer of thanksgiving:

*Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices
Who wondrous things has done, in Whom His world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still are ours today.*

*O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed
And free us from all ills in this world and the next.*

*All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,
The Son and Him Who reigns with Them in highest heaven* –
The one eternal God Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.*

No matter how difficult things may be for you right now, look up and remember: "His mercy endures forever." Now thank we all our God.

*"Him Who reigns with Them in highest heaven" is a reference

to the Holy Spirit.