

## Remember and Give Thanks

Let us pray: Pour out your Spirit upon us, O God, and increase our faith, that we may see you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Annual Celebration of the Thanksgiving Holiday is one way that we mark time. It stands on the cusp between Fall and Winter and ushers in the Christmas Season.

“Come, ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home; all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin;”

It’s always seemed to me that Thanksgiving provides a helpful vantage point from which to review our life’s journey of the past year. If you want to be humbled before the mystery of life and realize your reliance on God, all you have to do is pause and ponder, just for a brief moment, all the changes that have occurred since last Thanksgiving.

In my family, both happy and sad events have touched our lives, which I’m sure is true for you and your families as well. Of course, this year 2020 has been forever altered by the Coronavirus! Talk about humbling! As Thanksgiving Day approaches, we’ve all been trying to figure out how we can celebrate safely and responsibly. Let’s just let out a collective, “Sigh”! Shall we?

As a spiritual exercise, I encourage you to reflect upon this past year and ask yourselves: “In spite of the significant changes that have occurred, the sacrifices and losses, what do I want to remember and give thanks for?”

For instance, as much as masks have been an unwelcome part of our life this year since March, I am so thankful that by doing something so simple as wearing one, together, we can have such a powerful effect in mitigating against this deadly virus! Right? An added benefit is that they help keep your face warm when your outdoors walking in sub-freezing temperatures!

Also, I know that we all want so much to be back worshipping in our beautiful churches! In person in our favorite pews! Zoom is not our favorite medium! Some refuse to use Zoom.

2.

But.....what I want to say today is this: "Thank you God for Zoom"! Because of it we can continue to do what we as a church do: that is, worship God together, publicly, on Sunday morning and continue to foster and further the love of God and neighbor.

Because of virtual services, e-mails and phone calls; because of social distancing, wearing face masks, and being caring and care-full, we have been able to keep our church open all year in spite of the virus! Yes, open. We have remained open throughout this pandemic, even though we've had to keep our church building closed. Thanks be to you O God!

"Don't forget!" is the theme of our Deuteronomy reading today. A more positive way of stating the message is this: "Remember" as in "Remember God"

Moses wants to impart the vivid memory of God's faithfulness into the hearts of his listeners; mostly the next generation of believers following the Exodus. The book of Deuteronomy reminds us all of the benefits of being thankful with this advice. "Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God".

One of the good things about giving thanks is that it makes us more aware of our dependence on God. For the Israelites, remembering meant retelling the story of how God brought them out of Egypt and gave them freedom- freedom not to do anything they wanted to do, but freedom from fear, freedom from bondage, freedom from false gods.

It strikes me that human nature hasn't changed much since the writing of Deuteronomy. It is odd, but true: it's easier to recognize how much we need God's help when we are walking through dark valleys ourselves. Perhaps the real test of faith occurs when things are going great. The bestowal of many blessings can quickly become a temptation to God forgetfulness and false pride.

As it reads in Deut.8:17: "Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth". It seems to point directly back to thanksgiving as a way of living out what we believe which is stated so eloquently in the lyrics of a hymn by Brian Wren:

### 3.

“We are not our own. Earth forms us, human leaves on nature’s growing vine, fruit of many generations, seeds of life divine.

Through a human life God finds us; dying, living, love is fully known, and in bread and wine reminds us: we are not our own.

Therefore let us make thanksgiving, and with justice, willing and aware, give to earth, and all things living, liturgies of care...”

Every generation of God’s people, including our own, seems to suffer, at times, from spiritual amnesia. That is why rituals that aid us to remember who we are, and whose we are, are so important: habits of the heart that help us recall that we are God’s people—that God, is good: that God not only made us, but also cares for us.

As we sing in the great Thanksgiving Hymn,

“God, our Maker, doth provide for our wants to be supplied, come to God’s own temple come, raise the song of harvest home”.

Thanksgiving flows from a basic trust in the goodness and mercy of God which follows us all the days of our lives”, to quote another well-loved Psalm.

Back in the Middle Ages, the English Mystic, Julian of Norwich, wrote a parable. In a revelation from God given to her during prayer, she imagined holding onto an ordinary nut in her hand.

“Here in my hand is a hazelnut,” she thought to herself, “a small thing, round like a ball...

See in this little thing three truths: God made it. God loves it. God keeps it.

Can we not say of ourselves, what Julian said of the hazelnut? “God made us; God loves us; God keeps us.”

An attitude of gratitude is connected to the experience of grace in our lives. As Karl Barth once put it, “Gratitude follows grace like thunder follows lightning”.

#### 4.

The grace we encounter may be of such a magnitude that the word 'miracle' comes to mind. But there is something also known as 'common grace', the kind we experience daily, if our eyes are opened to see it. ,

Remember the story of Moses' call? He was out tending his father-in-law's flock when he saw something like a bush on fire yet it was not being consumed. What happened next? According to the story, Moses said to himself, I must turn aside and look at this great sight".

That sacred pause made all the difference.

Thanksgiving often begins with recognition-noticing what is right before our eyes!

Are you familiar with the flower paintings of Georgia O'Keefe? About 5 years ago, on our way to visiting family in Arizona, we went first to Sante Fe and had a chance to visit the Georgia O'Keefe museum. Her style was to make small things huge, so that people couldn't help but notice them-especially flowers: "Nobody sees a flower really;" she write, "it is so small. We haven't time, and to see takes time-like to have a friend takes time".

After many years spent in the wide open spaces of Texas and New Mexico, O'Keefe moved to New York City. She began to paint flower she noticed there, like petunias and other common garden flowers. She believed beauty can be found anywhere if we look for it, and she looked at the flowers growing on dirty pavements and found beauty there.

And so it is with God, who can also be found anywhere if we are truly looking, sometimes even in the most unexpected places.

Jesus showed us God in a Big way, even though God showed up first among us in the form of a tiny baby in a small town. But as Jesus taught and by the way he lived and died, he magnified the love of God similar to a Georgia O'Keefe painting.

One specific ritual of remembrance that we practice in worship, once a month, is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We call it "Holy Communion" but another word for it is "Eucharist", which literally means "giving thanks".

When we break bread together, we first of all ‘remember”. Jesus asks us to remember each time we celebrate the sacrament.

This remembering is not restricted to Holy Communion.

It carries over to the meals of our daily lives as well as to our holiday meals.

Whenever and wherever we break bread, we can remember.

We can remember the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can remember the loving providence and care of our Maker. And we can remember the beloved community of the Holy Spirit.

We can remember that even though bad things happen in our lives; grace happens too. And abundantly!

We can remember that nothing in this world, not even the coronavirus itself, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

We can remember all these things....and we can give thanks!