

What Else Do You Expect? Give Thanks!

Today is one of those days when the American Church is blessed with an embarrassment of riches, triggered by a fluke of the calendar.

Christmas is always December 25, and Advent is always the 4 Sundays preceding Christmas. The first Sunday of Advent, as I wrote in my newsletter article, always begins the new church year. So next Sunday begins a new Year very creatively named, C.

That makes today, the last Sunday of Year B (an equally creatively name B), always labeled Christ the King Sunday. The texts appointed for Christ the King Sunday are always texts that tell the something of the story of the Crucifixion. Such is the situation of the Church calendar.

The uniquely American twist to this whole calendar situation is this. Today is also Thanksgiving Sunday, so today, rather than ignore one theme or the other, I believe it will be good to consider something of each Sunday, Thanksgiving and Christ the King if we can do so without creating great contortions in our hearts. I believe that giving thanks will tie them together quite nicely. So let's look first at the American side of this coin.

Our great American holiday is just a few days away. Any of us coming thru elementary school in New England have heard the story of the 90 Native Americans and 53 pilgrims and their three day feast of Thanksgiving in 1621. Those first immigrants would have starved in their first winter had it not been for the generosity of Massasoit, and the Wampanoag people since food shipments from England were so inadequate. Of course, there is nothing provincial about us - but let us confess that we New England folk are not nearly so well versed in the story of the Thanksgiving feasts and services at Jamestown, Virginia. Something to learn about.

Back to Plymouth. The Summer of 1621 was generous, the harvest was good, the native Americans were skilled in teaching the immigrants how to hunt, fish, and preserve the catch. Therefore, they were able to look to the winter of 1622 with considerable and well-founded optimism with regard to their food stores. Life is better, when there is reason to believe that

starvation is off the table. Thank you.

Thanksgiving and harvest celebrations happened again and again for the next 140 some odd years around the young nation until, deep into the civil war, the then President Abraham Lincoln, proclaimed the last Thursday of November to be a National Day of Thanksgiving. Years later, Congress would designate the 4th rather than the last Thursday of November as the national holiday, and FDR would sign that bill into law. It would be JFK who began the practice of officially “pardoning” the white house turkey, a tradition that continues till now.

I confess I rather enjoyed my wander through the Wikipedia articles on the history and traditions of Thanksgiving. Check it out for yourselves.

Because Thursday will be Thanksgiving Day, and, because I have been with you long enough for you to know the importance I place upon thanks giving for our spiritual and emotional health, I hope you are expecting me to urge us to give thanks to God for all the blessings God pours into our lives. That is in part exactly what I intend to do; to invite us to renew and deepen our practice of giving thanks.

The day and the tradition of Thanksgiving become allies with the preacher who wants to call the congregation to growth and deepening the practice of thanksgiving.

Here it comes - T day with the memories we bring each year, recalling the folks with whom we have shared the table, the dishes we love - the creamed onions and Brussel sprouts, and as a child, the unheard of wonder of being able to set aside dishes I believed that I disliked. Seems like Tday was the only day when I did not have to sample no-thank-you helpings of everything on the table.

There it is, the day with its back story reaching deeply into American history, and its very name Thanksgiving Day calling us to the giving of thanks. Praise God! There is no way to avoid the giving of thanks on Thanksgiving Day.

All that said, however, giving thanks on Thanksgiving day is simply to put a toe in the water of the ocean of the possibilities of the practice of thanksgiving to sustain our lives and spirits, and to place us in right relationship with our God. I want to invite us to wade, perhaps even to dive deeply into the

waters of Thanksgiving, to follow the lead of our scripture lesson from the letter to the Colossians, which turns our attention from giving thanks for the goodness of an American holiday, to giving thanks both to and for the very One we call God.

Friends, today, is not just the Sunday before Thanksgiving, it is also Christ the King Sunday. This tidbit from Paul's letter to the faithful sisters and brothers in Colossae helps us see the something of the big picture view of Christ as Redeemer, Savior and King.

He began with sort of the usual greeting, then he tells them that he has heard of their faith, and the good and deep ways they love all the believers in the neighborhood. Apparently it was much like the love you together share for all the folks who are and have been members of this church. It is a love that grows out of the hope of the good news, woven together in the mutual regard and kindness they offer one another, and Paul observes "it (this love) has been growing among you from the day you heard gospel, and began to see and understand the grace of the living God."

He goes on, "ever since we heard of you, we have been praying for you that you be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and understanding, so that you will live in ways that are worthy of God, and that delight God. May you grow in good work, may you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be strong in God's strength and be ready to endure with patience, all the while joyfully giving thanks to God who qualifies you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. God has rescued us from the power of darkness, redeemed us, keeps us in that same place in the universe with Jesus God's own beloved child."

Now friends, I believe, and I invite you to join me in understanding that the prayers of Paul, the prayers of Jesus, the prayers of those early folks that we encounter in the scriptures, live on to become prayers for us in our own time.

So Paul prays for us, that we, that you and I will be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and understanding, that we will live in ways that delight God, and are worthy of God. Paul prays that we will grow in good work, and grow in the knowledge of God. He prays that we will be strong in God's strength, and be ready to endure whatever comes with patience, all the while joyfully giving thanks to God who qualifies us to share

in the inheritance of the saints in light, because God has rescued and redeemed us, God, as it were, keeps us in the same “place” in the universe, in God’s heart , as God’s own beloved child, Jesus.

Then Paul goes on to try to name, to describe something of the greatness, something of the more of God that certainly lies beyond what we can ever truly know or understand. Perhaps the psalmist said it best when he wrote hundreds of years before Paul, saying, “Come behold the works of God, see what God has wrought upon the earth; God makes wars to cease; God breaks the bow, and shatters the spear.” Then the psalmist simply gives up listing stuff, collapses in the easy chair, and says in God’s voice, “Be still and know that I am God.”

It seems clear to me, that Psalmist and Paul take parallel paths. See the big picture, folks. Look and See what God is doing. **Give thanks.** Look back, See what God has done. **Give thanks.** And when all that is too much -overwhelming - - entirely too much wonderfulness, Be still. Just be still. “Be still, know that I am God.” **Give thanks.** I have a plaque in my office quoting part of this verse. It reads, “Be still and know that I am.” “Be still and know that I am.”

When we become still enough to know that God is - there is but one thing to say and one way to say it. Whisper, “thank you” in the silence of our hearts.

When we see the workings of God, whether it be in the ordinariness of a dish on the thanksgiving table, or in the depths of what God in Christ our King has done for us; when we see the workings of God with sufficient clarity that we find ourselves in awe, that is when we whisper “thank you” in the silent depths of our hearts.

So today and this week, when Thanksgiving Sunday, and Christ the King Sunday coincide let us give thanks. Let us utilize the gift of that coincidence to look ever so deeply into the world and times around us to see once again the ways in which our God is working, the ways in which God is with us, the majesty and the humility of Christ our King and let us become still, very, very still, and simply whisper, “Thank you.”