

October 12, 2014 "Between the Knife and The Fork" Psalm 106:1-12

When I was a child, even a teenager, it was a lot easier, to be giving thanks at this time of year. A couple of miles outside of Port Arthur, there was a turkey farm. Anyone who drove west on John St. would see the flocks of them in the farmer's pens. We knew where the roast beast came from, the farms. We knew where the potatoes and the tomatoes and the peas and carrots came from...our own gardens. We knew where the bread came from...because we had smelled it baking in the oven. We knew the flour was processed Canadian wheat. And few of us were allergic to the stuff (by which I mean the flour) or the stuffing made with (for the most part) plain white bread.

And most of us, when I was a kid, bowed our heads to give thanks for the feast that wound up on our plates between the knife and the fork. We knew where the food came from, and a majority believed that God was the one that made the egg, hatch out a chick, the seed yielding fruit after its kind. The creation connection was fairly obvious. In some ways that is how I became a believer in those teen years. And if I am asked why I remained a believer in part the answer is because I have never lost sight of the fact that the food we eat, and at times I admit eat too much of, comes to us courtesy of a gracious, loving and redeeming God. Here are 5 things I see in the portion I read to you from Psalm 106.

First of all Psalm 106 issues a commandment, an instruction, to be followed. "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good." There are two things in that statement in the first verse. It commands you and I to do something. To give thanks. I didn't know our kind decorator was going to place this instruction so beautifully on our Communion Table but I am grateful that has been done. Yes, look at the pumpkins. The instruction is to Give Thanks. Something for us to do in the midst of the celebration, at the table as we share in the feast between our knives and forks. I say this to you and to myself. Take a moment to give thanks to God for every morsel you eat this weekend. Don't fall into the trap of thinking it is a good idea...actually do it. "Thanks God for everything on the table!" "Thanks God for every mouthful we enjoyed." Don't be ritualistic about it. I certainly do not care whether you do it at the beginning, during or after the meal, but do not let the moment escape without doing this. Give thanks out loud.

There is a significant confession of faith in those first words of Psalm 106. "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good." It is a fundamental characteristic of God in the Bible. He is good. That means His nature is not like ours. He is not a confusion of a life force. There is a Christian greeting that goes like this...Person A says, "God is good." Person B responds, "All the time." Person A says, "All the time." Person B says, "God is good." Try that with me...I'm person A, You are B. God is good. (All the Time.) All the time. (God is good). We have all just made a statement that is true about the Father, true about Jesus, true about the Holy Spirit...the One God world without end! Reason enough to give thanks.

Second point in Psalm 106. "His love endures forever." This requires a little more faith than you think if you are going to affirm the statement at the end of verse 1. If the plate between your knife and fork is full and even heaped with good things to eat, it may be easy to see that God loves you. But what about the moment when life in its unfolding, unrolling nature devastates you? Yesterday Barbara and I attended the funeral for a woman who was the life long partner of a friend of ours. He believes and he continues to hold the Lord His God in high regard. But he weeps and would be quick to say he

has seen better days. God's love endures forever. That means even in the bad times, the painful times, the times when our world is coming apart at the seams and our bodies weep as we try to cope. "For the God on the mountain, is still God in the valley." In spite of what we are feeling in the valley, reason to give thanks. "The God of the day, is still God in the night." His love endures forever, every moment, every day....even when we cannot see for the tears and the storm clouds.

Third point. "Remember me O Lord when you show favour to your people. Come to my aid, when you save them." There is a temptation the enemy offers us in the midst of the experience of the grace of God. We may be able to see that God is good to our family, our friends, our tribe, our church, and yet we may harbour and dare I see even cherish, the fear that His blessing is somehow too rich for our blood...too good for us. We are tempted to think and we can often point at circumstances as justification for our fears, that somehow we are beyond the pale of God's care and His grace. Why did God send Jesus into the world? "That whosoever believes on Him (Jesus) should not perish but have eternal life." It is not the shedding of our blood that is significant, but the shedding of the blood of Christ. When God saves them...He saves us. Give Thanks!!

Point 4, "that I may share in the joy of your nation, (O God), and join in your inheritance in giving praise." You see there is a visible nature to faith. You may indeed think you do not have very much. And you may in fact be tempted to stew over the fact that you do not have much faith. Quit trying to count the beads. Take note of these facts. You "gather together to ask the Lord's blessing". You may question the degree of reality of your faith...you are doing the first and most basic thing faith does. In choosing to be here...even if you have chosen to be here because somebody else asked you to come with them...you have chosen to participate in the primary activity of the people of God. You have chosen to hold the words of the songs of praise in your hands. You have been willing...and sadly so many have not been willing...you have been willing to stand with those who sing the praises of God, to sing with the ability you have the praises of God, to be present in the midst of the people who do so. People who have no faith....simply do not do these things. You may say, "I do not do these things often enough." Are you sure? Are you sure God is keeping score as though this were a hockey game? You are doing the most visible thing, faith does. You are right now doing the most visible thing Christian faith does. Maybe you should just silence your fears...and give thanks. And give thanks again, when the feast is on your plate and between your knife and your fork.

Point 5. Psalm 106 verses 6 to 11 gives another, there are many of them, a description of God's saving of the Hebrews in the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. Some contend it is more accurately translated the Reed Sea. Doesn't much matter. Red Sea, Reed Sea, it was uncrossable. It meant the people who had decided to follow God under Moses out of Egypt were going to die at the hand of their former slave masters, except that God intervened and saved them. The portion begins with the words, "We have sinned, even as our fathers did....and concludes with the words, He (that is God, the Lord, saved them from the hand of the foe." Simple point. This has nothing to do with deserving the love of God and even less to do with having earned it. Not one of us deserves the salvation God has provided. We have all sinned, as our fathers did before us. In fact one of the great secrets of Thanksgiving is that God has saved us, in spite of what we deserve, in spite of what we have done and what we do. We do not deserve what we find this weekend on our dinner plates between the

knife on the right side and the fork on the left. We do not deserve the abundance. We do not deserve the certainty of leftovers that repeat the feast the day after and for many the day after that. We have received in spite of what we deserve. And there again reason to Give Thanks.

Finally, Point 6. Verse 12. I will try not to belabour the point. "Then they believed God's promises, and sang God's praise. That's the essence of the Thanksgiving celebration. I won't call it the holiday, even though I know for many that is the highlight of this weekend. Extra time when we do not have to work. The point is you and I and our loved ones will sit down to a meal. And you can really only call it a feast. Main course, refreshment, bread, desert. Choruses of "O I am so full." There has to be a moment in there when the penny drops and we see something that has nothing to do with food and drink, and everything to do with the fact that God has touched our lives in Jesus Christ, poured out a portion of His Spirit upon us beyond our deserving and it is delicious beyond words to describe. We use words like "taste and see, the Lord is good." Aha! Eureka! "Then they believed God's promises. Then they sang God's praise. I am going to ask you to say it one more time....God is good....All the Time...All the time....God is good. Give Thanks. Give Thanks.

Let us pray;

Lord be with us throughout these golden days of this precious weekend. Excite us with what we can see between our knives and forks. Excite us with those with whom we share the meal time. Excite us with the smells of dinner cooked and served. And hear us as we return our thanksgiving to you as we sit at our dinner tables. Amen