

October 10, 2021 Thanksgiving: Just do it! Colossians 2:6-12

Thanksgiving has evolved. And I want to be absolutely clear on this. It is no longer what it was when it started out. In the beginning, this holiday started out as a holiday that focused attention on the fact that we are dependent on the grace of God our heavenly Father, on Jesus Christ our Saviour, and the Holy Spirit, who is God with us, for the food we eat. For the fact that HE blessed the seeds placed in the ground, and the cattle with young, caused some of the eggs to hatch and become chickens so that people would have enough to eat to survive the winter when food cannot be grown. It was from beginning to end a festival in which believers turned to the Lord to say thank you.

Today it is about a lot of things. When possible, gathering with the whole family for a feast. Its about entertainment. Football, hockey and baseball top the list, along with some feel good movies. In the U.S., and we Canadians are greatly influenced by our neighbour to the south, it is as much about football as it is about food. A more recent trend is that Thanksgiving marks the time when you turn the corner. Get ready for colder temperatures. Eventually snow and Christmas shopping. And it becomes easy, even for believers to skip over the reality that once was assumed...taking time to pray. Giving thanks for what we have and have received.

There is nothing wrong with watching your favourite sports on television. I will watch football, in and

around the other events of the day. I will enjoy the feast with as many of my family as we can get together. If all goes as planned there will be 7 of us around the table. There is nothing wrong with enjoying the food and some entertainment on the television set. But even for people like us, it can be tempting to set aside who it is we are thanking, and what we are thanking HIM for. Like Christmas and Easter this is primarily a faith festival.

About a month ago, as I was doing some planning for upcoming services I reached for my calendar and looked for the date of Thanksgiving. I was surprised to discover as I ran my finger down the Sundays in October that it was not mentioned. According to the scenic calendar that hangs over my desk, tomorrow is Thanksgiving in Canada. A holiday it surely is. I hope to kick back and enjoy the day at the farmhouse. The leaves are changing colour. The birds that are still here are flocking to my feeders. A walk in crisp air is certainly on my agenda. Some sunshine would be nice. But what caught my eye was the assumption, by my insurance broker, that Thanksgiving does not have anything to do with Sunday...and Christian worship. Hence this rant, and the text, and the tone of the service in general.

When Paul the apostle wrote to the Colossian believers he was not addressing the holiday or the long weekend that occurs at this time. He was talking about a fact of life. People who believe in Jesus give thanks to the One God,

who is described in the Bible, and who is worshipped by the believers when they gather. So here I stand, and here I must, looking at a text that encourages you and I to keep the faith, and to give thanks, to really do it, give thanks to the Lord for all that we love and the food that we have, and the clothes we wear, and the air we breathe, to say nothing about houses that have in-door plumbing and central heating, and sound roofs.

Verse 7 of chapter 2 reminds us not just to keep thanksgiving in our minds, but to live the concept. When the apostle Paul invites us to be overflowing with thanksgiving, he catches the heart of the concept. We are supposed to bubble over with thanksgiving to God. That is why he starts the passage, with this fundamental statement: “Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in HIM....overflowing in thanksgiving.” To the much loved apostle thanksgiving is as natural to those who follow Jesus as breathing. It is part of life. And it is about giving thanks to the God who is and who redeems, who gave HIS Son so that all who believe might have eternal life.

Paul’s recipe for faithfulness, involves continuing to live in Jesus. Faith in Jesus, thank God. is not a temporary fix or a band-aid. It is a life long journey of learning and serving, giving and sharing. Here is what the Oxford dictionary says when it defines the word recipe: (1) medical prescription (a recipe is first about medicine for what ails us. (2) Remedy prepared from it..the recipe. (3) a statement of ingredients and

procedure for preparing a dish. To me the surprise was that the 3rd definition was not the first. Truth: we are healed as we live our lives in Jesus. Remember that. And give thanks to God.

The second and third ingredients Paul lists are “being rooted and built up in HIM” in Jesus. Jesus gives us roots so that we can deal with everything that life in this world dishes out. Birth. Death. And everything in between the two. Paul bids us to be “strengthened in the faith as you were taught.” You have heard me mention Mrs. Brown, the mother of my best friend in my teen years, who not only led me into faith in Jesus, but assumed the responsibility to teach me. Someone said last week to me that they appreciated the fact that sermons here at St. Andrew’s always come back to what the Bible says. Mrs. Brown was an example of that to me. The answer to my questions caused her to read her Bible and to tell me what she found in it. Being a disciple of Jesus, and that is what we are as people who believe, means walking with the Master, asking questions of the Lord, and seeking answers in HIS precious word.

We could do worse than read a Bible portion as we sit down to enjoy the Thanksgiving feast. Faith grows as we are taught. I have been privileged to have great teachers in my time. I include in the list, the Rev. Bill Farley, Professor Allen Farris and Dr. Glenn when I was at Knox College. Dr. Donald McGavran and Dr. Peter Wagner at Fuller, and Barbara

Mitchell, who has accompanied me for 53 years, my sounding board and counsellor, my soul mate.

But all of those ingredients that Paul lists build up to his final phrase, “overflowing with thanksgiving.” The point Paul makes is that we do not just have a lot to be thankful for. We have so much to be thankful for that we are like a cup that is full to the brim and overflowing. And it continues to overflow. And for some mysterious reason, that, is even more visible in tough times, than it is in less challenging times. For all the problems we have as individuals and even as a church, the blessings abound in our experience. I chose those words specifically because the King James Version concludes verse 7, with the phrase “abounding therein with thanksgiving. Remember Psalm 23? “You anoint my head with oil...my cup overflows.” Translation? You treat me like a prince who becomes a King. My cup overflows with the wine of God’s grace.”

As I said, I will enjoy the holiday which is Monday. I will watch some baseball with my son and part at least of a football game Monday night. But Sunday is the Lord’s day. Once again, the anniversary, every week, of the resurrection of Jesus who saves us, who bids us welcome to the Kingdom of God. And therefor this day, in the midst of this gathering, is the place where I begin to celebrate Thanksgiving, by giving thanks. If I had a glass of wine, I would say, dear friends, I propose a toast. Thanks be given to Jesus, who has loved me, and loves you,

more than we will ever truly understand. Thank you, Lord, for saving my life.

Let us pray:

Lord, I give thanks for your love which redeems. I give thanks that you pushed the reset button when I was young and sustained me through the rough patches. I thank you for my wife and family. I thank you for the relationships I have known in and through the church. The people who gather with me week by week to praise your name and to seek the truth in YOUR word, who pray with me and care about me. Lord, I love your Kingdom. Grant that we may enjoy everything we have and are as blessings received at your hand. Amen