

GIVING THANKS

Psalm 107: 1-9
2 Corinthians 9: 10-15

Faith Community
November 24, 2002

Introduction

In 1863 Abraham Lincoln declared Thanksgiving an official American holiday. He said, "It has seemed to me fit and proper that (our bounties) should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and voice, by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow citizens ...to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of Thanksgiving and prayer to our beneficent Father, who dwelleth in the heavens, and I recommend to them that while offering up the ascription's justly due to God, for such singular deliverance's and blessing, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to God's tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as many be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union."

Although every day should be Thanksgiving, I am glad we have one time specifically set aside to express thanks. Now, even though this holiday is being run over by the retail campaign for Christmas shopping, it is still a time to pause in the midst of this madness and give thanks to the God who created us and provides everything we have.

We spend so much time centered on ourselves – how we feel, what we are doing, what we want - it is refreshing to take time to thank the One who made us and gave us life.

I

What do we have to be thankful for? We can start at the most basic level. We are thankful for a home. Not only a building to live in but the universe we are part of. We are thankful for the beauty of creation, for a spectacular universe that is still far beyond our understanding.

Not only are we thankful for this world, but for the gift of life itself. We can thank God that we exist rather than not existing – that we have the gift of breath, a heartbeat, an active mind. We have been given a personality, as unique as our fingerprint. We have hearts to love with, minds to think with, spirits to know the unknowable.

We can begin by thanking God for the opportunity to be alive, and for a place to live. We thank God for the most fundamental gifts of life.

II

I think the greatest part of Thanksgiving is for a God who loves us. Imagine the One who created everything that exists cares about you and me! It is a simple statement but think of it – our lives matter to the most powerful force in the universe. We often feel like we aren't much - "Who am I that anybody should care?" We're lost in a crowd of billions of people. Yet Jesus tells us each one of us is important to God - "Even the hairs of your head are numbered."

Paul writes that we are God's masterpiece. God loves and cares for each one of us. In a world where we are a number, a statistic, an item in a database we are important to the most important Being in the world.

III

God loves us as a caring, strong, compassionate parent. Many people have had terrible experience with their parents. But, I think even from a bad experience we can imagine what a good, healthy, loving relationship can be.

Maybe, because of the circumstances of our lives, we can only see God's love like a photographic negative – with everything reversed and the opposite. From a bad parental relationship we know what a good one is because we know what the opposite is.

I had very good parents, who loved us and nurtured us, and who were a strong examples for us. They expected a lot from us. They loved us even in their criticism of us, as they tried to keep us from the things that would harm us, or were unhealthy for us, or were hurtful to other people.

I can imagine a parent even more wonderful than my own. One who was wiser - who always knew what was right for us, one who always knew the best way to respond. I can imagine one who was completely loving all the time, endlessly patient with our childish behavior, One who nurtured, supported, comforted - but also could provide "tough love" by not enabling destructive behavior to continue.

Can you imagine a parent who is ready to sacrifice everything for a child they love? That is God's relationship to us...all the love, care, concern, sacrifice we can imagine. God has demonstrated that kind of love for us in Jesus of Nazareth.

IV

Because of God's love for us we can give thanks even in our times of sorrow. We can still thank God even in times of loss. When we face the pain of death we can entrust our loved ones to the care of their creator.

I was recently called as police chaplain to the home of a family who had lost their 41-year-old daughter, who was mentally challenged. In the midst of their terrible loss they were still able to say, as so many have before them, "At least we know she is in a better place now."

Because we know the endless love of God we can trust God in life and in death.

You and I can thank God even in the midst of sickness, pain, and struggles. We trust God to be able to heal our sickness. God stands with us in those times when we face a tough situation. Through it all we know a good God has created us and loves us more than we have ever been loved before.

A friend of mine went to visit her husband in the hospital. He was seriously ill. He was in a large room with three other roommates. When she went to visit she would pull the curtain around the bed and sit beside him and talk. His condition continued to get worse. One evening they had arranged that she would come in and bring a tape player with her. She pulled the curtain around the bed, then climbed into bed beside him, and turned on the tape. Lying in the hospital bed together they held each other and sang along with the tape.

The tape was Louie Armstrong's, "What a Wonderful World." When they got to the end of the tape they could hear the other roommates singing along too.

In the face of immanent danger they were able to sing about the wonderful world God has given us. That is a profound trust in the loving God who has made us, and who keeps us in his care.

Conclusion

Thanksgiving. It is a marvelous time to thank God for all the goodness we have been given. We thank God for creation, for the gift of each of our lives, for the abilities we have been given.

As Christians we are particularly thankful to God, who loves us intimately. Thanks be to God.

Amen