

THANKSGIVING

Have you ever met someone who just seemed impossible to please. A large dog walks into a butcher shop carrying a purse in its mouth. He puts the purse down and sits in front of the meat case. "What is it, boy?" the butcher jokingly asks. "Want to buy some meat?" "Woof!" barks the dog. "Hmm," says the butcher. "What kind? Liver, bacon, steak . . ." "Woof!" interrupts the dog. "And how much steak? Half a pound, one pound . . ." "Woof!" The amazed butcher wraps up the meat and finds the money in the dog's purse. As the dog leaves a man waiting in line is watching everything that happened. He decides to follow the dog. It goes down the street and enters an apartment house, climbs to the third floor and begins scratching at a door. With that, the door swings open and an angry man starts shouting at the dog. "Stop!" yells the man. "He's the most intelligent animal I've ever seen!" "Intelligent?" says the man. "This is the third time this week he's forgotten his key."

You ever feel like that man? You see something amazing and it is met with a less than enthusiastic and unthankful response? This weekend is Thanksgiving, and I want to talk about giving thanks today.

Psalms 100:1 A psalm. For giving thanks. Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 3 Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

In this Psalm we see three things about thankfulness.

1. The Invitation of Thanksgiving (4)

Thanksgiving is a time that is set aside to remember to give thanks to God for all we have. Thanksgiving became an official Canadian holiday back on Thursday, January 31, 1957 when the Canadian Parliament proclaimed that Thanksgiving was to be "A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed." From the beginning the focus was giving thanks to God. It was an invitation to the nation to give thanks. We see this invitation in the psalm we read today;

Psalm 100:4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

In this verse the invitation to thankfulness is given. God invites us into His presence. I talked about this a few weeks ago when I talked about the fact that Jesus stands at the door and knocks. He is inviting us to come. To respond to his love and grace. God wants to spend time with us.

When I was in seminary (1990) I got a tape from a band called Crumbacher-Duke called World's Away. On the tape there was a song that always made me think called The Last Time. It goes like this; "And was the last time you heard from me the last I heard from you? Does my lack of inspiration mean your blue, from silence. Can it really be, the last time that you heard from me, was the last time I heard from you, oh how long since the last time..."

This song is God asking the question, "is the last time you gave thanks the last time you had something to be thankful for." The answer of course is no. We see God's blessings all the time but fail to take the time to say thank you for them.

Max Lucado tells about living as an American in Brazil. One day, as he was walking along the street on his way to the University to teach a class, he felt a tug on his pants leg. Turning around, he saw a little boy about 5 or 6 years old with dark beady eyes and a dirty little face. The little boy looked up at the big American and said, "Bread, Sir." He was a little beggar boy and Lucado said, "There are always little beggar boys in the streets of Brazil. Usually I turn away from them because there are so many and you can't feed them all. But there was something so compelling about this little boy that I couldn't turn away. So, taking his hand, I said, 'Come with me' and I took him into a coffee shop." Max told the owner, "I'll have a cup of coffee and give the boy a piece of pastry...whatever he wants." Since the coffee counter was at the other end of the store, Max walked on and got a cup of coffee, forgetting about the little boy because beggar boys usually get the bread and then run back out into the street and disappear. But this one didn't. After he got his pastry, he went over to the big American and just stood there until Lucado felt his staring eyes. Lucado said, "I turned and looked at him. Standing up, his eyes just about hit my belt buckle. Then slowly his eyes came up until they met mine. The little boy, holding his pastry in one hand, looked up and said, 'Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.'" Lucado said, "I was so touched by the boy's thanks that I would have bought him the store. I sat there for another 30 minutes, late for my class, just thinking about a little beggar boy who came back and said, 'Thank you.'"

What about you? How do you respond to the love and mercy of Jesus? Do you just take it for granted and forget it, or do you accept God's invitation to draw near and give thanks?

2. The Motivation of Thanksgiving (5)

What motivated the Psalmist to enter in and give thanks and praise? It was God's character and His conduct. His love and faithfulness through the years.

Psalm 100:5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

What is it that motivates us to give thanks today? What does Thanksgiving mean to you? The roots of Thanksgiving go back much farther than when it became a holiday back in 1957. The very first recorded Thanksgiving in North America was celebrated back in 1621 when the Plymouth colonists and Native Americans shared an autumn harvest feast. Maybe you have heard that story, but most of us do not understand the background of that story.

It was in 1605 that a Native American named Squanto from the village of Patuxet (Massachusetts) met his first white man. He later traveled to England with an explorer named John Weymouth. In England he experienced many adventures and was able to learn some English. He returned to America in 1608 - 3 years later. On his return to America he was kidnapped by Englishman Thomas Hunt who was one of John Smith's lieutenants. He was taken from Massachusetts, along with other Native Americans, by an English ship captain and sold into slavery in Spain. There, Squanto was bought by a Spanish monk, who treated him well, freed him from slavery, and taught him the Christian faith. Squanto eventually made his way to England where he improved his English and worked in the stables of a man named John Slaney. Slaney sympathized with Squanto's desire to return home, and eventually he was able to send him back to America.

It wasn't until 1618, ten years after Squanto was first kidnapped, that he was on a ship returning to America as a free man. When he arrived home he learned of the second blow delivered by the English. His tribe had died from an epidemic, probably of smallpox brought by the earlier colonists.

He and another native American, Samoset, went to live with a neighbouring tribe near Plymouth, MA. It was there that he was introduced to the new Pilgrim settlers.

And there, Squanto became a picture of forgiveness. He had been captured by the English and had been sold into slavery. His entire tribe had been wiped out by the English. Instead of being bitter he chose to help the 47 of 102 Pilgrims who had barely survived their first, harsh winter. He helped them build warm houses, he taught them when to plant their corn crop and how it should be planted. Without his help, there would not have been 20 acres of corn produced that year. Squanto also advised the Pilgrims in their relations with the other Native American. He helped them make friends, acted as an interpreter, guided them on trading expeditions, and gave advice on bargaining.

The Pilgrims wouldn't have made it through the year without the wisdom and guidance of Squanto. Governor William Bradford, in *Bradford's History of the English Settlement*, wrote regarding Squanto's death: "Squanto fell ill of Indian fever, bleeding much at the nose, which the Native American take as a symptom of death, and within a few days he died. He begged the Governor to pray for him, that he might go to the Englishman's God in heaven, and bequeathed several of his things to his English friends, as remembrances. His death was a great loss."

There would have been no first Thanksgiving without Squanto who made a choice to forgive out of the forgiveness that he had received in Christ. That Thanksgiving flowed out of the thankfulness of one man's heart. Through trials and difficult situations he had been prepared to be a blessing. Do you understand what that is like?

What do you have to be thankful for today? How has God's great love and faithfulness been seen in your own life in the past year? In two weeks is our Anniversary Sunday and also our fall congregational meeting. As I was writing my report I was again reminded of how good God has been to us as a congregation this past year, and also how good and faithful God has been in my own life. We have so many reasons to give thanks.

3. The Celebration of Thanksgiving (1-3)

Psalms 100:1 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 3 Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

So how do we respond to God's love and faithfulness? Notice the 3 verbs that are used here in Thanksgiving. The first is SHOUT. Shout for joy to the Lord. We come thoughtfully declaring aloud God's goodness. There are so many different reasons to give thanks.

Listen to these words that were written in 1621 by Edward Winslow, one of the fifty or so members of the Plymouth colony that survived that first winter. He wrote these words describing the first harvest festival: "Our harvest of corn came in well, and God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian Corn, and our Barley crop was also good, but our crop of peas wasn't worth the gathering – they were sown too late, and although they came up very well and blossomed, the sun parched them in the blossom. Once our harvest was brought in, our Governor sent four men out to hunt fowl, in order that we might have a special celebration, rejoicing together over the fruit of our labors. Those four hunters, in one day, killed enough fowl to feed our Company for almost a week. We were joined, in our celebration, by many Indians: the great Indian King Massasoyt, along with some ninety Indian men, joined us for three days of entertainment and feasting.

The Indians themselves went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the Plantation and gave as gifts to our Governor, and to our Captain, and others. And although our harvests are not always so plentiful, as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we often wish that you could be partakers of our plenty."

Look at those words again, "By the goodness of God, we are so far from want..." Those are profound words. By the goodness of God... so far from want. Is that your testimony today? It sure is mine. How do you respond to God's faithfulness? You sit down and you think about all the ways that God has blessed you. You put into words what God has done in your heart and then you shout it out – you declare it to others.

The second is WORSHIP. We come passionately expressing our hearts in response God's goodness. When we think of all that God has done for us the natural response is worship.

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to *offer* your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your *spiritual* act of worship.

The key word here is OFFER. Worship is all about offering ourselves to God. Why do we worship? It says here that we offer ourselves to God 'in view of god's mercy'. Worship is our response to God's love. God made the first move. It is up to us to respond. What does it mean when it says that offering ourselves is our "spiritual act of worship"? The word in the NIV for spiritual is LOGIKOS which means reasonable and is where the word logical comes from. In other words, worship makes sense – it is the logical response to God's love. We worship because that is what grateful awestruck people do.

The third is KNOW. That means that we experience God's goodness in our lives in a personal way. The word for know is the Hebrew word YADA and means more than just an intellectual understanding. It is the same word that is used in Gen 4:1 to say that Adam KNEW Eve his wife. It means first hand encounter.

Do you truly know that the LORD is God? That God has made you and that you are His? Take time to experience God's goodness in a fresh way this coming week.

There is a lot of things that we as a church can be thankful for as we look at where the Lord has led us in the past year. I am so thankful for the opportunities and ministry we have had. However, this thanksgiving I would like us to focus not just on where we have come from but where we are going.

In the coming year is there a ministry that God has laid upon your heart? Is there an area that God is asking you to get involved with? Maybe like Squanto God has been preparing you to help a certain group of people. Out of the overflow of what you have received in Christ perhaps you are beginning to understand that you have been blessed so that you can be a blessing to other people.

I want to motivate you today to action. I heard about a middle aged couple who lived in Michigan. They had a son that lived in New York and a daughter that lived in California. The wife said one day that she really wished her kids could be home for Thanksgiving. The Dad picked up the phone the day before Thanksgiving and called his son in New York and said to him, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are getting a divorce. After 45 years of misery, enough is enough. You can call your sister and tell her."

Frantic, the son called his sister in California, who exploded on the phone. "There is NO WAY they are getting divorced," she shouted, "I'll take care of this." She called her dad back and said to her father. "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do anything until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we are both flying home tonight - we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?" The man hung up his phone and turned to his wife. "Okay, honey. The kids are coming for Thanksgiving... and they are paying for their own flights."

Make sure you take time this weekend to celebrate. Spend time with family, eat a turkey if that is what you enjoy, but most importantly take the time to say thankyou to God for His many blessings. If the Government of Canada thought it important enough to give you a day off, the least you can do is to take the time and open you heart and express your gratitude.

One of the ways you can do that is at this communion table that is set before us. As you take this bread and this juice, remember that God so loved you that Jesus came to die on a cross for you. As we remember His body that was pierced, His blood that was shed, let us offer up our thanks.