

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

November 21, 2021, Christ the King Sunday-Thanksgiving

Psalm 126; Matthew 6:25-33

THANKSGIVING PLANNING

I was in a Zoom meeting on Thursday and someone said to the group, “you do know that next Thursday is already Thanksgiving, don’t you? They seemed surprised that it had snuck up on us so quickly.

In these days before Thanksgiving do you find yourself swamped with the pressing questions of the season:

Are there enough pies for Thursday?

Is the turkey too big or not big enough, or do you even know where you are getting your turkey?

And do we have the kind of cranberry relish everyone likes,

and will anyone guess if the stuffing & potatoes come out boxes, and the gravy out of a jar,

And what vegetables will the kids eat, or can we just skip the vegetables because no one eats the vegetables, does anyone coming really like green bean casserole?

Or the monumental question: marshmallows or no marshmallows on the sweet potatoes?

And in case you somehow missed it, these are also the days of Black Friday Shopping. These are the days when we realize that Christmas really is coming again, and what are we going to do for presents for everyone in the family, our friends, our coworkers, and friends at school?

And how do you plan your Black Friday shopping when some stores have been bombarding us with Black Friday ads and sales for the past two weeks. And does anyone really miss the middle of the night shopping? But, how early will you need to be awake on Friday morning to get the best deals?

Since Halloween the stores have been filled with Christmas music and it seems like these are the days when all we can think about is how we are going to get everything ready:

What about the Christmas cards, and getting the house decorated?

Will we put up the decorations outside now, before the next snow falls?

If you are a baker, how many kinds of Christmas cookies will you bake, and when will we put the tree up,

and do we really have to go to that one Christmas party we were able to avoid last year because of Covid?

And in the grace and humor of our loving God, this is the day that the lectionary text assigned for this pre-Thanksgiving, pre-Black Friday, pre-Advent, pre-Christmas Sunday is Matthew 6:25-33 that

gives us Jesus’ words for this day, and this time, and these questions, and this place, here in this Sanctuary, Jesus says to us all:

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Therefore, do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?' or "What will we drink?' or "What will we wear?' ...indeed, your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

This is the day, this pre-Thanksgiving, pre-Black Friday, pre-Advent, pre-Christmas day

when we can make a choice before we leave this sanctuary.
 We can choose what kind of Thanksgiving we will celebrate on Thursday,
 we can choose how we are going to prepare for the season of Advent
 and the season of Christmas,
 we can choose what kinds of gifts we are going to give, or not give,
 we can choose how we will experience and give away the love and joy of this season we are
 entering.

But to make a choice about how we enter into this holiday season, we need to decide what
 comes first. We need to decide *Who* comes first.

As followers of Jesus, we are being asked this morning to choose God and God's kingdom
 first, so that we are reminded of how much our God cares for each of us, and for those we love.

The Message translation puts it this way: "Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-
 provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met."

So, think for a moment, if you choose God's kingdom first, if you "steep your life in God-reality,"
 how does your Thanksgiving change, and how does it remain the same?

What do you gain, and what do you lose in your plans for the day, if you seek God's kingdom
 as your first plan for Thanksgiving Day?

Are there some more people that need to be invited to come to your table?
 Do you know who in this sanctuary, or in your neighborhood, or in your circle of friends are going to
 be alone on Thursday?

Are there different ways you can be together with family and friends on Thursday that shows
 what a gift they are in your life?

Is there a way to focus the day on God's gifts that goes beyond saying grace before the
 meal?

What will your Thanksgiving look like if you seek God's kingdom first?

And what about plans and gift-giving throughout the season of Advent and Christmas? If you
 put God at the top of your to-do list,

what will you keep in your December schedule and what can you let go?

What kinds of gifts will you give, or not give?

How will you celebrate the people God has put in your life?

How will you prepare to welcome the Christ-child once again into your heart and home during Advent,
 the season of preparation that begins next Sunday?

One of the gifts of the pandemic, and yes, I think there are some gifts, is that last Advent and
 Christmas was very different for most of us. Life got slowed way down, many of the usual activities
 just couldn't happen.

Some of these are still not happening, but if your life is like mine, then many of the "normal"
 activities are creeping back in. More of the frenzy of the season is trying to push its way back into
 life.

When we choose God's kingdom first, we are invited to be intentional about what we do and
 don't do in the next month before Christmas morning.

This is the day, this pre-Thanksgiving, pre-Black Friday, pre-Advent, pre-Christmas day when
 we can make a choice before we leave this sanctuary.

Let us trust in the life-giving love of our God, who cares for the birds of the air, and the flowers of the
 field, and for you and for me and for the people of the world.

Then let us turn toward Thanksgiving and Advent and Christmas by seeking God and God's kingdom first.

Then let us enter into the true heart, joy and love of this season that is opening before us,
with God at the top of our to-do list!