

THANKSGIVING DAY - 2018

Joel 2:21-27; I Timothy 2:1-7; Matthew 6:25-33

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

I REMEMBER LEARNING ABOUT THANKSGIVING IN GRADE SCHOOL. MY CLASSMATES AND I MADE PAPER BONNETS OR FEATHER HEAD DRESSES AND TURKEY PLACEMATS. THEN WE GATHERED IN THE GYM AND SAT AROUND ON THE FLOOR FEASTING ON POPCORN, CORN BREAD, AND APPLE JUICE WHILE OUR TEACHERS TOLD US THE STORY OF HOW THE ENGLISH IMMIGRANTS ARRIVED IN CAPE COD HARBOR IN 1620 AND CLAIMED THE TERRITORY AS NEW PLYMOUTH. WE CALLED THEM PILGRIMS, WHICH OF COURSE THEY WERE – WANDERERS FROM ANOTHER PLACE WHO HAD COME SEEKING A NEW WORLD. THEIR STORY IS PART OF OUR AMERICAN HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY. WE LEARNED THAT THEY WORKED HARD AND STUGGLED WITH DISEASE AND HARDSHIP. AFTER WEATHERING THEIR FIRST HARD WINTER, DURING WHICH MANY HAD DIED OF DISEASE AND MALNUTRITION, THEY MANAGED TO PRODUCE MEAGER CROPS, SO THEY CELEBRATED WITH A HARVEST FESTIVAL AND INVITED THE NATIVE RESIDENTS, THE AMERICAN INDIANS, TO JOIN THEM. THEY FEASTED FOR THREE DAYS ON “LOCALLY GROWN” FOOD INCLUDING VENISON, SHELLFISH, WILD TURKEY, CRANBERRIES, SQUASH, AND CORNBREAD, DRANK THE FIRST WINE FROM THEIR WILD GRAPE HARVEST AND GAVE THANKS TO GOD FOR THEIR DELIVERANCE FROM DROUGHT, PESTILENCE, AND STARVATION. WE’VE TENDED TO ROMANTICIZE THANKSGIVING AND IT HAS BECOME A FAVORITE

FAMILY HOLIDAY FOR MANY OF US. WE LIKE TO THINK THAT IT'S FREE OF THE RAMPANT COMMERCIALISM THAT MARKS CHRISTMAS, EASTER, AND EVEN HALLOWEEN. BUT THAT'S NOT QUITE TRUE. AFTER ALL, WHERE WOULD THE MAKERS OF BUTTERBALL TURKEYS AND OCEAN SPRAY CRANBERRIES, AND THE MANUFACTURERS OF GREETING CARDS AND THE FOOTBALL TEAMS BE WITHOUT ALL THE RITUALS THAT MARK OUR THANKSGIVING CELEBRATIONS? AND YET THANKSGIVING DOES NOT BEGIN OR END WITH TURKEY DINNER OR FOOTBALL GAMES OR EVEN WITH THE PILGRIMS. SOME YEARS AGO ERIC ZORN HAD AN EDITORIAL IN THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE THAT IS JUST AS TRUE TODAY AS IT WAS THEN. IN IT HE SAID THAT WE HAVE MANY BLESSINGS AND THAT WE LIVE BETTER THAN KINGS. HE WROTE, "BASED LARGELY ON THE PURE, RANDOM LUCK OF BEING ALIVE AT THE DAWN OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM, MOST OF US ARE FAR HEALTHIER, FAR MORE COMFORTABLE AND HAVE FAR MORE OPPORTUNITIES AND DIVERSIONS AVAILABLE TO US THAN 99 PERCENT OF ALL THE MONARCHS, EMPERORS, MAHARAJAS, AND OTHER POTENTATES WHO'VE EVER LIVED. WE LIVE LONGER, EAT BETTER AND TRAVEL FARTHER THAN THE RICHEST AND MOST BLESSED PEOPLE IN VIRTUALLY EVERY OTHER GENERATION IN EVERY LAND IN HISTORY." YES, WE HAVE MUCH TO BE THANKFUL FOR BUT WHAT ABOUT THOSE TIMES WHEN LIFE IS RAVAGED BY STORMS, BOTH LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE, THOSE TIMES WHEN WE HOLD OUR BREATH WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP? HENRI NOUWEN WRITES THAT WE OFTEN DIVIDE OUR LIFE INTO GOOD THINGS TO REMEMBER AND GIVE THANKS FOR AND PAINFUL THINGS TO

ACCEPT OR FORGET. IT'S EASY TO BE THANKFUL WHEN LIFE IS FULL OF PLEASANT EXPERIENCES BUT WHAT ABOUT THOSE TIMES WHEN LIFE DOESN'T GO THE WAY WE HAD HOPED. CAN WE GIVE THANKS IN THOSE TIMES? I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK ABOUT THE PEOPLE OF PARADISE, CALIFORNIA WHO HAVE LOST EVERYTHING. HOMES AND CARS AND THE THINGS THEY NEED FOR BASIC SUSTENANCE ARE ALL REDUCED TO ASH. A WHOLE TOWN – SCHOOLS AND SHOPS AND OFFICES – BURNED WITH NOTHING LEFT BUT RUBBLE, AND FOR TOO MANY FAMILIES, LOVED ONES INCINERATED IN THE FLAMES. HOW CAN THESE SURVIVORS BE THANKFUL? AND YET, OVER AND OVER AGAIN, WE HEAR PEOPLE SAY THEY ARE THANKFUL – THANKFUL TO BE ALIVE, THANKFUL FOR THE HELP THAT HAS COME TO EASE THEIR SUFFERING. NOUWEN REMINDS US THAT “THE CROSS IS THE MAIN SYMBOL OF OUR FAITH, AND IT INVITES US TO FIND HOPE WHERE WE SEE PAIN AND TO REAFFIRM THE RESURRECTION WHERE WE SEE DEATH. THE CALL TO BE GRATEFUL IS A CALL TO TRUST THAT EVERY MOMENT OF OUR LIFE CAN BE CLAIMED AS THE WAY OF THE CROSS THAT LEADS US TO NEW LIFE.” OUR THANKFULNESS IS BORN OUT OF A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AS KNOWN IN JESUS CHRIST. THANKFULNESS COMES WHEN WE RECOGNIZE GOD'S ABIDING, INDWELLING PRESENCE WITH US EVEN IN THE MIDST OF HARDSHIPS AND UNCERTAINTIES. GOD SURROUNDS US WITH LOVE AND GRACE THROUGH THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE US, THE COMMUNITIES OF FAITH WHO SUPPORT US, WORDS THAT ENCOURAGE US, SACRAMENTS THAT NOURISH US, AND HOPE IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS. GOD GIVES US NEW

STARTS AND FRESH BEGINNINGS. WE COME HERE TODAY TO SING AND PRAY OUR THANKSGIVINGS. WE ARE PART OF A COMMUNITY OF FAITH. LOOK AROUND AT ONE ANOTHER AND SEE THE IMAGE OF GOD'S LOVE. YOU, THE CHURCH, EMBODY GOD'S LOVE. I SEE GOD'S LOVE IN YOU – IN YOUR EYES AND IN YOUR FACES. GOD GIVES US OPPORTUNITIES TO SAY THANK YOU BY REACHING OUT TO OTHERS. SO WE EXTEND A HELPFUL HAND OR A WARM EMBRACE TO ANOTHER. ONCE AGAIN, WE WILL COME TO THIS TABLE TO CELEBRATE THE EUCHARIST – THAT FINAL THANKSGIVING SUPPER, WHEN JESUS BROKE BREAD WITH HIS DISCIPLES. ON OUR TABLE WE WILL PUT THE FRUIT OF OUR LABOR, THE BREAD THAT WILL SUSTAIN US AND THE WINE THAT WILL ENLIVEN US. CHRIST WILL BE PRESENT WITH US JUST AS SURELY HE WAS PRESENT WITH HIS DISCIPLES. WE WILL REMEMBER HIS PAIN AS WELL AS HIS JOY, HIS SUFFERING AS WELL AS HIS GLORY AND WE WILL BE EMPOWERED TO LIVE ALL OF LIFE AS A GIFT TO BE RECEIVED WITH THANKSGIVING. SO THIS THANKSGIVING DAY LET US GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE OUR DEPENDENCE -- ON THE BREAD WE EAT, ON THE NOURISHMENT WE DISCOVER IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND MOST OF ALL OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD. WE DO NOT GIVE THANKS ONLY BECAUSE WE HAVE WEALTH OR HEALTH OR ANYTHING ELSE. WE GIVE THANKS BECAUSE GOD IS AND WE ARE AND GOD'S PROMISE AND LOVE SHALL BE WITH US WHEN TIME ITSELF SHALL BE NO MORE. THANKS BE TO GOD.