

“Thankful for the Bread of Life”

Date: November 20, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Philippians 4:4-9; John 6:25-35

Theme: Thanksgiving

Occasion: Thanksgiving service

I have a couple of “turkey” jokes for you. What do you get when you cross a turkey with a banjo? – A turkey that can pluck itself. Why can’t you take a turkey to church? – Because they use FOWL language. Why did they let the turkey join the band? – Because he had the drumsticks.

Ok, those are all *turkeys*, I agree. But, how about this pearl of wisdom from Carl Sagan, the late scientist who got us talking about “billions and billions of stars?” Sagan said, “If you wish to make an apple pie truly from scratch, you must first invent the universe.”

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.... Amen?

On Thursday of this week our nation sets aside one day of the year for national thanks-giving. It is a civic holiday, an American tradition. It is not a *Christian* holiday as such. And yet, the very idea of giving thanks is rooted in our Judeo-Christian heritage.

Certainly, there are strong connections between the civil and the religious, and we dare not forget that many of our founding fathers and mothers were quite devout in their faith. As Christians, we of all Americans, need to remember what this day for – giving thanks!

Thanksgiving is at the very heart of Christian worship. Philippians 4:6 states: “In everything by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be known to God.” Ephesians 5:20

tells us, “Always and for everything *give thanks* in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, *giving thanks* to God the Father, through Him.” Scripture is quite clear, we are to give God thanks, not just in the good times, but at all times.

Giving thanks; it is more than just good manners. Goodness knows we need to teach our children good manners – to say “please” and “thank you.” But for the Christian it’s more than just lip service. It is an attitude about life.

When we give God thanks we are reminding ourselves that we are in debt to our Heavenly Father. I can’t make an apple pie, truly from scratch, because I can’t invent a universe. God did that. God is the great Creator and the Great Provider and the Great Sustainer.

Giving thanks shows not only our appreciation, but also our dependence on God. The people of God know they depend on God. Christians know they depend on Jesus Christ. We wouldn’t have the blessings we have without the grace and love of God our Father.

And so we place our trust and our faith in God and in our Savior, Jesus Christ. My brothers and sisters in Christ, we do not depend solely upon ourselves, either for the food we eat, or for the joy of eternal life.

In our Gospel lesson today, we hear Jesus say, “Don’t work for the food which perishes, but rather for that food which lasts forever and gives eternal life.” Too often, we only give God thanks for the temporal things of this world. We give God thanks for stuff, but stuff will perish. Jesus urges us to seek the spiritual bread of life.

Jesus goes on to say that He is that spiritual bread. What does he mean? Well, let's think about it. Bread sustains life; without food life cannot go on. But life is more than mere existence. Real life is a new relationship with God, a relationship built upon trust and love.

Jesus Christ makes that relationship possible. He is the bridge over troubled waters. He carries us over the great sin-divide, uniting us once again with God. This is the work of Calvary, the work of the cross. He died that we might be free from sin. Amen?

Many people have the physical necessities of life. But without Christ in their hearts, they remain lonely, angry, frustrated, restless. Jesus turns mere existence into true living.

This Thanksgiving, may our hearts be truly grateful, both for the bread we eat that nourishes our body. But also, and even more so, let us be thankful for the bread of eternal life, Jesus the Christ. Amen?

But that is not the end of the story, I mean the sermon. If I only give God thanks for what I have received, I am still centering the universe around myself. It's all about what I have been blessed with. Yes, I need to be grateful for my blessings, including my salvation.

But if I look around and I see others who do not have their basic needs being met, shame on me. If I look around and I meet someone who has not met the Savior who has loved me into Heaven, and I don't share the good news with that person, shame on me.

Let's break down that word *Thanksgiving* again. The first part of the word is *thanks* – the attitude of gratitude. The second part of that word is *giving*. Each Sunday before we receive our offering I say these words, "With grateful hearts, let us give to the Lord."

Giving flows from our gratitude. Otherwise we give reluctantly, or out of obligation, or we resent having to do it. But when our hearts are filled with gratitude, giving should naturally flow outward.

It is incumbent upon those of us who have been blessed with much to share with those who have little. Life has been hard and cruel to many people. Jesus calls us to shelter the homeless, but also to do more – to work for public policies that do not put people out on the streets.

Jesus calls us to give to our local foodbanks, but also to work for a society in which everyone has access to family-sustaining jobs. Jesus calls us to care for the widow, the orphan and the stranger in our midst, just as did the prophets of the Old Testament.

It was to the lowest of society that Jesus reached out. And that is our mission field as the church. Not because of any particular political party we may belong to, but because we belong to the Kingdom of God.

To be fat and happy with what we've got, while neglecting the needs of the poor, the disenfranchised, the outcast, is to neglect our Christian duty. We have forgotten the full meaning of thanks – giving. Yes, be thankful. But also, give so that others can be blessed also.

God blesses some so they can be a blessing to others. God will use people like you and me to answer the prayers of someone else.

This Thanksgiving holiday, let us remember to praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Let us also remember to reach out a helping hand to a brother or sister who needs a hand up. Hand in hand, we pray and work

together, so that God's kingdom may come, on earth as in heaven.
Amen? Amen. May it be so.