

Sunday, October 9, 2016

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Philippians 4:4-9

John 6:25-35

Gratitude Day

Happy Thanksgiving! Many people have expressed this greeting in these last few days leading up to this weekend but what does it mean? Thanksgiving is not a 'religious' holiday but a day which has been celebrated by the First Nations people who celebrated their crops being harvested long before any newcomers came to what we now know as North America. Martin Frobisher crossed the Northwest Passage in 1578 and began a fall celebration in Canada to rejoice that they lived crossing the ocean and were safe before winter set in. This of course was long before the Puritans/ Pilgrims and the Mayflower in US history which we often hear about which began in 1621.

President Lincoln declared the US Thanksgiving to be that 4th Thursday of November in 1863, but it wasn't until 1957 that Parliament designated this 2nd Monday as our national day to celebrate Thanksgiving. The reason that it is earlier is because of climate differences and of course the fall harvest comes in sooner! Yet what is Thanksgiving? For most people it is an opportunity to give thanks for what is good in our lives, nature's bounty and beauty and a delicious bountiful meal with family and friends.

But there were other "Thanksgiving" celebrations well before Canada and the US declared national holidays for it.

Our reading from Deuteronomy 26 is part of the teachings God gave to the people of the promise about what they are to do once they entered the Promised Land. They were to take possession of the land, to settle it and then take some of the first-fruits of all that was produced from the land and put these items into a basket and then present it to God. At that sacred moment the people were then to recite their story and how God brought them from slavery into freedom, from Egypt to Israel, from a time when they had little to nothing to a land that was flowing with riches- milk and honey and all things good. God also stated that they were to rejoice in all the good things God gave them. To rejoice, that is show that they are very happy about something.

Many generations have lived and died since Moses received those celebration instructions. I wonder do we rejoice like they did those first years in their Promised Land? Do we rejoice at all—or do we complain- I have so much to do—baking pies, defrosting the turkey, peeling the potatoes, preparing the squash, turnips, setting the table and making everything just right.. But do we take time to be happy at Thanksgiving? That is, does our time of Thanksgiving reflect any happiness at all or are we merely eating well? Are we truly grateful for who and where we are in life? Are we fully aware of the blessings of this life?

Some thoughts for you to consider:

“If you have food in your fridge, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world.

If you have money in your bank, your wallet, and some spare change, you are among 8% of the world’s wealthy.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million people who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the agony of imprisonment or torture or the horrible pangs of starvation, you are luckier than 500 million people alive and suffering.

If you can read this message, you are more fortunate than 3 billion people in the world who cannot read at all.”

You are blessed so how do you respond to these blessings? We can be thankful—that is glad that something has happened or not happened. We can give thanks- by sharing kind thoughts with an expression of gratitude. We can be grateful which means showing appreciation for the benefits received. But do we do these things?

Paul in writing to the church at Philippi was very clear as he wrote to this young church. He stated, “Rejoice, show that you are happy in the Lord. Let gentleness be seen in you as evidence of your commitment to Jesus. Do not be anxious about

anything, but present your requests to God by prayer and petition. And do this with thanksgiving. Paul said to rejoice because you are happy with God. Be glad by being kind and gentle in your commitment. Don't be afraid of anything—take your concerns to God and do so with thanks. What will occur if we do this? God's peace will guard our hearts and our minds will be focused on Jesus. We are to rejoice—not just when the calendar says "Thanksgiving Day" but to rejoice always and pray to God because we need to express gratitude.

Neil Pasricha started writing a website called "1000 Awesome Things" in 2010 asking for people's ideas of things for which to be thankful. Ordinary moments experiences, and within a year this website grew. Pasricha then published a book about these thoughts and experiences under the name "The book of Awesome". Each entry invites us to think and reflect upon those things in our life which we can appreciate just for what they are. For example what does the smell of freshly cut grass remind you of? Or how wonderful is it when you feel the warmth of your pajamas as you pull them from the dryer. Or what about that unexpected and long hug when you really needed some encouragement and support in that moment. Simple things but moments when we can turn to God and say Thank you.

Many people had experienced the bread and fish lunch and they wanted to see Jesus do more miracles. He knew this and so he tells them that they are looking for the wrong type of food. They had worked only for food that will spoil instead of what could sustain them eternally. They were looking only to be physically satisfied but when Jesus told them to do the work for food that endures they did not understand.

The work of God is to believe in the One- Jesus, whom God sent. For in him we will find food for life. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Yes many of us will share in a bountiful meal this weekend as we celebrate the autumn, the harvest, the season's change and Thanksgiving. We will become physically full for a while. Yet at one point soon after- our bodies will need to be fed again. Jesus said, I am the bread of life. If we believe in Jesus our spiritual hunger will be fully met. But we must be willing to do the work of God and believe in Him and tell others.

As we enjoy this time with family and eat and share together, let us show our gratitude, let us be thankful, and let us be grateful for God's blessings. God has given to us his most precious gift in Jesus His Son, and nothing else will compare to this.

Let us pray:

Holy God, we thank you and we are grateful. Help us to show our gratitude to you every day for we are blessed because of Christ Jesus Your Son. Help us now to be thankful for Jesus in our lives and enable us to express our gratitude in what we share with others today and always. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.