

“Thanks Living”

Psalm 30 • Luke 17:11-19

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 22, 2020

As you know, this week is Thanksgiving, which is the day we set aside as a nation to celebrate the two great American pastimes – eating and football. Some of you are already thinking about all that turkey and dressing and potatoes and if you’re still hungry vegetables. And then there are the desserts – pies, cakes, cookies. OK, now I’m hungry. So I guess we’ll get to see if last week’s message on self-control has had any effect.

Seriously, though, why do we really have the Thanksgiving holiday? Most of you know the story of the first Thanksgiving with the pilgrims and the Indians in Plymouth, Massachusetts in November of 1621. The pilgrims were their first successful corn harvest. They held their second Thanksgiving two years later, in 1623, this time to mark the end of a long drought that nearly destroyed their crops.

In our country we often think of Independence Day as our most important national holiday. I would argue that Thanksgiving Day is at least as important to our country as the Fourth of July. When we look at the history of Thanksgiving in our country you discover that it has been an important part of who we are as a nation.

In his 1623 proclamation, Governor Bradford called on the Pilgrims to a day of thanksgiving because God had provided abundant crops, protected them from major disease, and allowed them to worship freely. He wrote, “Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house...to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings.”

It wasn’t until 1789 that we had the first formal call for a national Thanksgiving Day. George Washington issued a proclamation saying, “it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and

humbly to implore His protection and favor.” He then declares that Thursday, November 26th, 1789 is “to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious King who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be.”

Every president, with the exception of Thomas Jefferson, has called for a day of thanksgiving for the nation. Sometimes it was in the Spring, sometimes in the Fall. The most interesting thing about these presidential proclamations, especially the earlier ones, is their purpose. Thanksgiving Day was made a holiday to give people an opportunity to gather for worship. In 1887, Grover Cleveland’s proclamation said, “On the day let all secular work and employment be suspended; and let our people assemble in their accustomed places of worship and with prayer and songs of praise, give thanks to our Heavenly Father for all that He has done for us while we implore the forgiveness of our sins and a continuance of His mercy.”

The issue is not, though, whether we have another worship service that day. The bigger issue is whether we are living *every* day as if it’s Thanksgiving. Are you worshiping God with your whole life?

In our reading from Luke’s gospel this morning, we have this familiar story of Jesus healing the ten lepers. This passage is all about thanking God for his many blessings. The point of the story is that you and I have been “healed.” We have been cleansed by Jesus of so much and we certainly should be thankful.

The key to understanding this passage, I think, comes in verse 15: “Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.” The Bible tells us that “he *saw* that he was healed.” He became aware of the gift he’d been given. At that point he couldn’t help but go back and say thank you. From that moment on his entire life was

different. We don't know, but I suspect that he lived the rest of his life thankful to Jesus.

We're told that once he discovered that he was healed that his thanksgiving was expressed by "praising God with a loud voice, falling down at Jesus' feet and giving him thanks." His thankfulness didn't just result in a changed mind, it resulted in changed behavior. He couldn't help it. Jesus then tells him, "Rise and go your way; your *faith* has made you well." Jesus isn't talking about an intellectual faith, he's talking about faith the results in changed behavior; it results in a lifestyle of thankfulness that is expressed in actions.

So what are those actions? I think there are basically three ways that we can show someone our gratitude, three ways we can show our thanks. This applies to showing thankfulness to people and to God. The first and most obvious is that we communicate our thanks. You let people know that you appreciate what they have done for you. This can be a note or a phone call or thanking them in person. The idea is to let them know. Of course, the way we communicate with God is through prayer.

A second way we can show our appreciation is by doing something special for the other person. This might involve inviting them over for dinner one night, or helping them with a project around their house. The idea is that you

show your gratitude by serving them. We show our gratitude to God by serving other people in His name.

The third way of showing how much we appreciate someone is by with a gift. For example, if your neighbor waters your plants and picks up your mail while you're on vacation, you might bring her a gift that you pick up on your travels. Just something to say, "thank you." We give to God as a way of expressing our thanks for all that He has given us.

As we've seen from this passage, the key to thankfulness is seeing what God is doing in your life. In other words, counting your blessings, and then praying, serving and giving in response as a way of saying "thank you." As you thank God for what He is doing in your life, you will begin to notice *more* ways He is at work and your relationship with Him will be strengthened further.

So what about you? This Thanksgiving, what are you thankful for? And are you thankful enough that it motivates you to action – to pray and to serve and to give? That's the kind of worship we need this Thanksgiving. We can call that Thanks *Living!*

Amen.