

“Blessings of the Table”

Preached by Pastor Brahm Semmler Smith at the Thanksgiving Eve Service
11/26/2014

Sisters and brothers in Christ, as we come together to worship this Thanksgiving Eve, may we be aware of God’s blessings in our lives now and always. Amen.

As we begin, I ask you a question that comes out of the video we just saw. This video from the 1950’s tells us that it is all about being happy. Is it? Is that what Thanksgiving is all about? As we gather around tables tomorrow to feast and give thanks, is it all about being happy? Is giving thanks also a commandment to be happy?

The video also asks at the end, could you wish for more? Could we? Do we? What is it we could wish more of?

The video seems to assume that the answer to that is “no, things are pretty great around this Thanksgiving Table, why no, I couldn’t wish for more.” I don’t know about you, but the tables I usually gather around are not exactly that well-mannered or well behaved or perfect! For some, this meal and weekend are times of stress that they loathe, or are times of loneliness and longing. And I would be remiss to not note that in our modern times, Thanksgiving is found in the midst of a season that says, okay maybe take an hour or two on this Thursday to give thanks for the blessings in our lives, but then in a few hours start thinking about all the material stuff you don’t have in your life and go out and buy it.

It is good to take time thanks, and to remember the blessings of gathering together, of sharing a meal, and the blessings and joy that God has brought to our lives.

Here at Trinity we are in the midst of a series called the Advent Conspiracy, where we are challenging ourselves in our preparations for Advent and Christmas to worship fully, to spend less and give more, and to love all. Pastor Sarah last Sunday spent time on the spend less/give more, where she challenged us to spend less money on material things but to give more of ourselves and our presence in the gifts that we give this upcoming Christmas season. Advent is about God’s presence coming into the world and in our lives. In turn, we are called to consider where God has already been present in our lives and world, to give thanks for that, but to also see where we hope for more signs of God, and where God might be calling us into this world to bring about God’s kingdom. And it all begins with this act of Giving Thanks. An act of Worship. Thanksgiving, if we let the gratitude it brings about linger, can be the perfect precursor into advent and our preparations for the coming of Christ into our midst.

This act of giving thanks is at its core a deep act, an act that comes from your inner most being. It is not something that can be forced, but it comes from within. Author Anne Lamott wrote a book about prayer in which she asserts that there are three essential prayers, "help," "thanks," and "wow." She writes that "Thanks is the prayer of relief. . . . The full prayer, and its entirety, is: *Thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you*. But for reasons of brevity, I just refer to it as *Thanks*." And thanks can come after some pretty small things, like thanks for the great day of work, or for the issue with my car not being the transmission needing to be replaced, to emotionally heavy things, like thank you for getting me through this set of medical tests, or thank you, we get to stay in our house, or thank you for letting me get

through this day without taking a drink, or thank you for letting me spend this time with her during her last days.

Lamott says that in saying thanks in all these circumstances, the good, the bad, the ugly, the easy, the hard circumstances, that if we do it enough, our acts of thanks can turn into a way of being: gratitude. She says that gratitude is a way of being that begins in our hearts but then carries over into affecting how we behave, in how we live and recognize God's presence and love, and how we are then able to serve others and bring about joy in our lives and the lives of others. When we are gracious to God, we can't help but serve and be gracious to others.

Gratitude as a way of living is what I believe I see in the interaction between Jesus and this one leper who comes back to give thanks in the Gospel lesson for today. All ten lepers are healed, but Jesus says to the one who comes back, "your faith has made you well." He was already healed, but this act of thanks coming out of his gratitude is what makes him well. In this way, we see that there are spiritual consequences of being gracious and giving thanks.

So maybe, yes, I could wish for more. But not the more that is filled with material things and stuff, but more in terms of the act of thanksgiving that turns into a way of living that is centered on gratitude and being generous to others as God has been generous to me. As I recognize the blessings that are in my life, I can wish for more signs of God's kingdom in my life and in the world. More signs of the kingdom that involve gratitude, peacemaking, mercy, and justice; especially living in a world of war, violence, and racial strife that has been very apparent this past week as we wrestle with the events surrounding Ferguson, Missouri, and what justice, peace, and mercy look like in our current world.

It is with this brokenness in mind that I give thanks that we gather around not just our thanksgiving tables tomorrow, but more importantly that we gather around God's table of Thanksgiving tonight as we celebrate Holy Communion. We come together to celebrate an ultimate feast that is provided by God and centered on Christ. And we are included in this feast. Tonight, we celebrate communion with 7 of our young people, who will receive the grace of God in bread and wine for the first time. And it is such a cool thing. One of my favorite parts of being in Christian community. Because tonight we share in a feast that promises us something more than just a normal meal. And it is something that we carry with us as we prepare for the meals of tomorrow.

In sharing this communion meal, we are reminded of the joy we receive in God's grace, the connection we have with God, the connection we have with others, and the blessings we receive which we are then in turn to share with others. Communion is not just a personal act. It is a community act of grace and forgiveness and love. And it is centered on a table that is God's. My hope and prayer for us is that communion can be a model in how we feast with others. As we gather tomorrow around the Thanksgiving Table, and as we gather at all our meals with others, we remember the blessings of God's table. May we remember the joy of God's grace, the connection we share with God and others, and be called in gratitude to be gracious to others in return. With gracious hearts, we take time to say, Thank You God! And we ask for more. More God. More gratitude. More of God's kingdom to come. Amen.