

Sunday October 12, 2025

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 23 – Creation Time 6 - Thanksgiving

**Sermon:** “Giving Thanks”

When I worked as a street outreach worker in Toronto there was one segment of the homeless population that I found it almost impossible to work with; the youth. Some of the homeless youth were easy to spot because they lived in a youth shelter or were in transit to a youth shelter. Others worked hard to make themselves invisible, or perhaps they themselves were in denial about their homelessness as they performed marvelous feats of sofa-surfing, and no, that is not an Olympic sport. Sofa-surfing means to move from sleeping on the sofa of one friend for a few nights, to sleeping on the sofa of another friend for a few nights.

The ones that I found difficult to work with were the ones who lived in the shelter system, and never in my life have I ever met a group of people who were such total and utter ingrates. They depended on others for their housing and meals. They depended on others for their transportation and clothing. They depended on others for money for person hygiene products and the like. They depended on others for all of the necessities of life, for everything. Those others were people like me, social services workers. Those others were people like you, taxpayers who paid for their benefits cheques and the salaries of social service workers. These youth not only had no sense of gratitude for what they received, they very often complained about not having enough or of not being treated like demi-gods. In their minds, what they received was owed them. Indeed, a great deal more than what they received was owed them, or so they thought. And because what they received was owed to them, they were not in the least bit thankful for what they received. And that attitude made me feel both great pity for these pathetic spoiled examples of human life, and exceedingly angry. It was these homeless youth that I found it hardest to serve.

Moses himself served homeless youth. The generation that left Egypt died away in the forty years of wandering. The homeless Israelites that were about to enter the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey, were a new younger generation. They were either not alive, or at least not old enough to remember the laws that were established for the Israelites during the exodus, and so, as they neared the time of entering the promised land, Moses repeated the laws for this new generation. And just what is it that Moses has to say to a bunch of homeless youth? “When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling place for his name....Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.” In other words, you shall give thanks, you and all the other people who live in the land shall celebrate together and give thanks.

What I'd like to know is, what has changed over the last 3500 years that we feel we no longer need to give thanks? And why is giving thanks so important? What does giving thanks accomplish? I think that giving thanks reminds us that we are owed nothing. That all that we are and all that we have, including life itself, is a gift from someone greater than us, is a gift from God. It lets us off the hook from being responsible for everything, for the suffering in this world caused by natural disaster, for those killed in the hurricanes this year, for those starving because either drought or flood have destroyed their food supply, for those killed due to earthquake, mudslide, tornado or volcanic activity. It does not, however, let us off the hook for the suffering that results from human activity, like bombings and shooting rampages, environmental degradation, for hatred and prejudice, and so on. Giving thanks also reminds us that we depend on one another. We cannot possibly be entirely self-sufficient. We need one another. Why, I couldn't even give this sermon without someone to listen, and I couldn't have eaten

breakfast without someone to pay me, or someone else to produce the coffee and bread and sell it to me.

We have too much. We expect too much. And we think that what we have is deserved, because of our own efforts. And many in the next generation have truncated that belief into we deserve it because we are. The question is, who do we think we are? Gods? Well, actually, yes! That's the problem, we think we are gods. We are the masters of our own good fortune. The flip side of that record is that if we have not good fortune, we have nobody to blame but ourselves, for there is no God other than us. And that is a terribly sad and lonely thought. And yet, we don't want to be gods, for we deny all responsibility for whatever befalls us. No matter if we burn ourselves with the Tim Hortons coffee held between our legs as we drive away from the drive-through or injure ourselves in a collision because we were too intent on the text message we were trying to send. Somehow it always manages to be someone else's fault.

In their song, 'Calling All Angels,' the group Train say that we live in a world where we only want what we want until we have it. Seemingly, when we have what we thought we wanted, we realize it is really something else we want, and so we chase after some other idol. Soon we have a temple full of false idols, and we still don't have what we really want. There is another musical artist, Cheryl Crow, I think, who sings that the real trick is not getting what we want, but wanting what we have. And what is that? What is it that we really long for? What is it that is already there and available for the asking? Put another way, what is it that we ought to give thanks for?

I believe that today's gospel lesson gives us the answer. Our deepest, and often most unacknowledged yearning is for the true bread from heaven, the bread of life. Our deepest yearning is for spiritual nurture, for a relationship with God. Our deepest yearning is to know that we are loved by God, that we matter.

The reason that we gather here today is to give thanks. We give thanks for God who gave us life and thanks to God for the life we have received; eternal life yes, but also for the life of these whimsical bodies of flesh and breath. And so, God, to you we say L'chaim. To life. Thank you.