

"Please Pass The Stuffing"  
November 20, 2016

Psalm 90:1-13, Luke 17:11-19

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Hayward United Methodist Church

Call to Worship Psalm 100

Shout triumphantly to the LORD, all the earth!

Serve the LORD with celebration! Come before him with shouts of joy!

**Know that the LORD is God—he made us; we belong to him.**

**We are his people, the sheep of his own pasture.**

Enter his gates with thanks; enter his courtyards with praise!

Thank him! Bless his name!

**Because the LORD is good, his loyal love lasts forever;**

**his faithfulness lasts generation after generation.**

Prayer of Invocation

**Almighty and gracious God, we give you thanks for the fruits of the earth in their season, and for the labors of those who harvest them. Make us, we pray, faithful stewards of your great bounty, as you provide for our needs, and the relief of all who are in need, to the glory of your name. Send now your Holy Spirit to inspire us in our thanksgiving worship. Amen.**

The Word John 6:25-35

**When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"**

Jesus replied, "I assure you that you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate all the food you wanted. Don't work for the food that doesn't last but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Human One will give you. God the Father has confirmed him as his agent to give life."

**They asked, "What must we do in order to accomplish what God requires?"**

Jesus replied, "This is what God requires, that you believe in him whom God sent."

**They asked, "What miraculous sign will you do, that we can see and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat."**

Jesus told them, "I assure you, it wasn't Moses who gave the bread from heaven to you, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

**They said, "Sir, give us this bread all the time!"**

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Living the Word

I am blessed this Thanksgiving with the opportunity to host the family dinner on Saturday for 10. By then the family members that have gone north for their other family's year to have Thanksgiving on Thursday, will be back, the hunters will be almost done and I will have had time to prepare...I will be cooking on Thanksgiving to prepare for our Saturday meal. I am very blessed, indeed! But so are you, as I am a better speaker than a cook.

We have much to be thankful for in this Community: wonderful emergency service, a good hospital, beautiful and cutting edge school facilities, churches that work together and much more. It could be our own little Utopia. There is a small town feel, yet new folks are welcomed in. Of course these are only my opinions.

We have much to be thankful for in our Country: I have been around the world, and I know how blessed we are to have running water, temperature controlled homes, multiple choices at the grocery, and on and on. But there is a bit of a problem with all of this. As Christians, when we say 'God Bless America', are we asking God to limit the blessings to just us?

As Christians should not we be saying God bless all of your children. We are thankful for all that we have received, but we really haven't shared as well as we could...as well as we should. After all, we are the Christians, modeling our lives after Christ, who gave his all for us. Enough said for now, but a little repentance is good for the soul.

Let's move on to the gathering and feast of the week:

- Turn to someone you won't be with during the Thanksgiving Feast and share who you will be with? Each share 30 seconds.
- What will be your favorite food tomorrow?
- What are you thankful for? .

Now let's go into the past for a moment:

- Who will be missing at your table tomorrow? (pause for prayer: "Lord for all of those not with us tomorrow, we remember and lift them to you." silence.)
- Do you have a Thanksgiving tradition you can share in 30 seconds?

It is good to remember, though the past is still the past. So let's move to the future: Sometime this week, most of us will sit at a table laden with family favorite foods. We will sit down with the intention of not eating too much, but the variety and the conversation may move us to take too much, and then eat too much.

It takes a full 20 minutes for the first bite to register on the 'fill meter' in your body. By then you will have finished at least the first plateful and possibly have moved on to seconds. By the time we stop, the hurt will begin to set in. Then someone will make it worse by saying "Please pass the stuffing." I am not trying to discourage you, just giving a gentle reminder...

The feast is tradition, and so is eating too much! Stuffing ourselves with stuffing...Though I am a pastor, I am not going to remind you that gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins. After all, it is only one day of the year that we eat like this, or is it? Back to the stuffing: As I was working on this sermon, awake Friday morning at 6:30am, I realized that though I had titled the sermon weeks ago, I had forgot to put stuffing on my own menu.

What would thanksgiving be without the stuffing? Literally? What if instead Thanksgiving was about eating what is needed to sustain the body, and the stuffing part was given away. What if the extra bread was the money we have kept for ourselves that we could help someone else out with? What if the sage is the wisdom we need to share with one another?

What if the other spices are meant to bring activity to one who is depressed? What if the giblets are just reminders of the heart of all of us that we are afraid to risk with each other? The celery...a little harder to define, but remember how when you were in elementary science classes and you put the celery stalk in a glass of colored water and watched it soak it up into the stalk? What if that extra celery is some time to listen to someone who needs to talk, and carrying their burdens with them.

It is scary where your brain can go in the dawning light of the morning, when you really need to sleep. Thanksgiving needs to be more than the name of a date in November. It can be a verb as well as a noun. Thanksgiving should begin with acknowledging all that we are blessed with, and being appreciative. But it can be a spicy activity where we are given many more blessings by sharing our over abundance with the world.

It can begin by truly loving those you are with, this week and every week. In 2011, I was about to serve my first extended family Thanksgiving with the opportunity to host the family dinner for 21 people. My childhood home is a farm in Mann Valley, west of River Falls, just down the road a piece from New Richmond where I had been appointed that summer. When I moved there, my mother announced that since I now had a large parsonage, near the family, that I would be hosting Thanksgiving.

About mid September of that year, I realized that I haven't formally entertained as large a group as 21. , I realized that though most of the meal to be served at the parsonage that week would be coming from many cooks (church potluck at the parsonage) I didn't have enough chairs or plates or silverware or glasses. For most of it, I was again using the 'potluck method' of sharing, as family have chipped in to bring it together.

But for the glasses, I began to check out the thrift stores and bought enough clear glasses for all. They don't all match, but I hoped they would match even less by the time we ate. I invited my guests to use permanent markers and decorate them with their names. After the day was done, I had a shelf full of my favorite people's art work, and if I found myself hosting again, they would each have a glass waiting for them.

You may not find that idea in any magazine or internet 'decorating tips for Thanksgiving' but I was excited about it. The great part was that I was not aware of any artists in the family, so they all turned out to be interesting...and I used them many times with the family over the next five years of hosting family gatherings.

Don't let me judge your Thanksgiving: How much you will eat, what you will be distracted by...I'm not even going to comment on the fact that someone in their wisdom set football games just about all day to cover any time you thought you would have your family meal, and the same on Saturday meal times; or how you will experience the whole day. Instead let me invite you to seek new ways to know that you are blessed to be a blessing.

We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing and give thanks for it all!  
Prayer written by Walter Brueggemann in his book

Amid football, family, and too much food,  
    We pause quickly and without inconvenience  
        To remember and to thank,  
We remember ancient pilgrims  
    Who followed dreams of alabaster cities

And financial opportunity;

We remember hospitable first nation people  
Who welcomed them, and then lost their land;

We remember other family times  
Filled with joy and filled with anxiety, and  
Old scars still powerful.

We thank you for the U. S. venue of  
Justice and freedom, and are aware of its flawed reality;

We thank you for our wealth and our safety,  
And are aware of how close to poverty we are  
And how under threat we live.

We gather our impulse for gratitude today,  
Grateful to you and to our ancestors,  
Grateful to you for our families, our health, our government, and our many possessions.

We gladly affirm that  
"All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above,"  
But we yield to none in a sense of self-sufficiency,  
Our weariness in needing to share,  
Our resentfulness of those who take and do not give.

Your generosity overmatches our gratitude.  
We are ready to thank, but not overly so;  
We remember our achievements, our accomplishments,  
Our entitlements, and our responsibilities  
That slice away our yielding of ourselves to you.  
Move through our half measured thanks  
And let us be all through this day,  
More risky in acknowledging  
That we have nothing except what you give.

You have given so much – not least your only son.  
Gift us the gifts of dazzlement and awe  
That we may rejoice in our [next to last] lives  
And keep you ultimately all the day long,  
Relishing the wonder of your self-giving love. Amen.