

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Different types of Thanksgiving"
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October 11, 2015
Thanksgiving Sunday

On this Sunday that we say "Thank you" to God for life and for our lives, and for the abundance of food, relatively good health and a basic sense of freedom to choose what we want to do and be, we pause for a moment, just to let that sense of gratitude sink in. Sometimes we do not really feel grateful, but the opposite, that we are entitled to more than what we have or are. But it is in that moment, that we need to catch ourselves, and return to the gratitude, which often also brings contentment.

Contentment can be difficult as we are driven by many messages, getting more, being more, not being satisfied with what we have or are, but pushing on in consumption, power and position. Of course, farming can also be about production, and production figures, but at its best, farming and gardening teach us that if we make an investment (often a smaller investment) in time and faith in one season, then in the next season, i.e. in two or three months time, there will be a larger reward, a harvest. It's no wonder Jesus used the agricultural knowledge of his time to talk about spiritual realities. He used the parable of the sower and not sowing the seed, but rather working on the condition of our own hearts, the soil of who we are. He used the parable of the wheat and the weeds, to note that we cannot expect perfection in the church. He spoke of the lilies as a way to slow down and note God's beauty in creation, rather than our own adornments. If we make the small investment in our spiritual lives now, we will reap a generous harvest in the life to come. Sometimes we don't see the point in putting the seeds in the ground, because there is no immediate gratification. But gardening teaches us that little plants become gorgeous flowers and edible wonders, if we make that investment. Delayed gratification is something that God is teaching us our whole lives, from when we were infants to today. There is a great harvest coming, that we cannot see right now. There is a life to come coming, that some of us only see the deadly side of that equation, the loss of this life, but remember it is the gaining of the next. If we would take a bit more time to reflect on the kingdom here and now being planted, and harvested there and then, we might think differently about what we are going through. We definitely would think differently and would excel in gratitude.

Jesus wants us all to slow down for a few moments this weekend, to say "Thank you" to God together, as families, with friends, as we are able.

We know this.

Jesus is in the habit of telling us that we don't automatically get what's going on in life. We carry on. We think we know, but unless we take a moment to stop and reflect, we may miss what God is doing. So he asks us that question in Matthew 6 about what we worry about. What do you worry about? There's a question that you might ask others in your life, because it is hard to see ourselves in that mirror.

Men often worry about being a success in their work and women successful in their relationships, although they both can worry about both. Safety concerns, health concerns, taking risks, all provoke worry. Decision making, differences of opinion, time pressures also stress many and we worry to try to control the situation that we cannot control. Strangely, procrastination is a result of worry that puts something off that is difficult or perceived to be such. Procrastination is often used to reduce stress but instead does the opposite in the end.

Jesus wants us to look anew at our values, of what we might consider important in life. What we choose to eat and drink, what we choose to wear, which often is quite influenced by how we eat and drink. Our values are more important than these choices. Our values are what we plant in the ground like seeds waiting for the harvest one day.

But we choose, many of us choose to concern ourselves more with the food, and I love Thanksgiving dinner as much as the next person. But Jesus says "Don't let your appetites rule your life." Birds have plenty to eat, but do no gardening or farming. Flowers are more beautiful than the most beautiful apparel or jewelry, even the richest billionaire on the planet can't excel them in material, precious metals or jewels.

So as you are investing in your next meal, your next beverage, your next clothing purchase, Jesus says "Invest in that which lasts." "What lasts in this life?," you ask. Not much. So invest in that which you cannot see now.

Investment in the kingdom of God, in God's righteousness displayed through you. There's an investment that will have an eternal harvest. So how can you invest in that?

First, give yourself thoroughly and completely to Christ, all your resources, all your keys, your play, your gifts, your intellect, yourself, your relationships. Anne Marie and Raoul have given their child to the Lord. They have given themselves to the Lord at the front of the church. They have pledged to follow Christ along with their daughter. All of us have agreed to support their decision. All of us are encouraged to make the same decision, no matter how old our children are, no matter how old we are.

Second, begin to ask Jesus how he might use all of who you are in the kingdom of God, displaying God's righteousness in this life, well before the next. Ask him how he might use you to be generous, kind, compassionate, safe, listening, and turning your character defects into strengths, useful to the mission of God here. Perhaps it means KMS, keeping my mouth shut, rather than opening it with the usual results. Perhaps it means speaking up for God, and for love, and for truth, rather than listening to the opposite of these. Maybe it means asking for courage to speak and listening with God's intent.

Being passionate in anger and competition may be transformed into mercy, justice and caring for those who have nothing, here, and elsewhere. Kindness and love can transform those around you. This is not simply a recipe for giving in to others who want to abuse or control you. It is a new recipe from God to keep focused on that seed you have planted, and the crop that others, that Jesus will harvest. Truth and love, kindness and mercy, grace upon grace.

Sometimes we think thanksgiving is just a feeling that may come upon us, or not. But it is a life direction. That life direction serves others and not for one's own gain. That life direction, seeking God's mission, God's kingdom first, has its rewards, the repayment for the losses you have experienced over the years, symbolized in Joel's four kinds of locusts that ate your crops that you may have planted for God or for others.

Now heavenly repayment sounds funny in this day and age where we are over-mortgaged, overspending, over-credited, and over consuming. Of course overspending is mostly for immediate gratification, while deferred gratification, and looking to the future harvest is more difficult. Heavenly

repayment for losses is the best kind of repayment and perhaps the only repayment that lasts. Thanksgiving and gratitude plants a crop that will be harvested in heaven.

There are many types of thanksgiving to give to God. There is first of all the prayers, secondly, the sharing of the good things and experiences of this life with others; thirdly, the directing of others to how faithful God has been to you, through it all; fourthly, a constant reminder of your gratitude through your giving away to others, serving others. There's where you keep what you give away, but only when you take the heavenly view. Giving away may look like poverty in this life, or something greatly reduced from what you have experienced, but it is constant focus on a crop that will come forth as surely as the next life will. How much will you risk on investing in your relationship to the Lord and investing in the next life now? There is the daily thanksgiving question.

Let us pray.