

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"The Thanksgiving Table"
Dr. J. Dent

October 7, 2012
Thanksgiving Sunday
Holy Communion

Today the Scriptures remind us, or rather the Lord of the Scriptures reminds us that it is easy to worry about our lives, i.e. it's easy to be fearful. In former days, this was about having enough to eat and clothes to wear. Some vestiges of these former fears come up when we have a storm prediction, and people flood to the supermarkets here in Newfoundland as if there won't be much food available otherwise.

And it's true, it is easy to be scared about a lot things, not just whether your Thanksgiving turkey and meal will come out just right. Let me switch gears to the "obscure technology" category. It was reported this week that if you want to keep track of teenage or older children at home, you can install some specific applications for their smart phones. Apparently there are applications now that can measure how fast your child is driving. So if they are speeding, a text message goes to you the parent to tell you so. Or if they have a tendency to text in the vehicle, there is no an application on their phone which will disable their ability to text when the car is moving faster than 7 km/hr. Now the only question I have is this: Will this give you peace of mind or will these new applications simply worry you further?

Even though Jesus was certainly not an animal rights activist, he encourages us to look at our pets and at wild animals and plants. As we do so, we need to consider the fact that they are fed, whether the tiny birds, or the moose, or even your own animals. They are fed and tend not to be as worried as we are, certainly not about their appearance. I recently heard about a woman who badly burned herself while trying to curl her hair with an electric curling iron. Just to be clear, it was no one in my family. Apparently they can be as hot as the elements in your stove. So beauty has a high price sometimes. But Jesus says the animals and the plants and the birds are simply beautiful as they are. They don't get their nails done, or go to the spa or get massage therapy. They just live. Now don't get me wrong, I am not against taking care of yourself, and I do appreciate efforts you make to smell better, and to look better.

I am merely putting what Jesus says back to you as a way to reduce stress, not to pressurize you into some new position. Indeed, Jesus is trying to

move us from stressing out over the little things of life, to putting some serious energy into the largest things in life, like what we are doing and being so that God's community, God's program, God's way and will, God's perspective becomes more and more practical and more and more a part of who we are.

So it is unlikely that on this Thanksgiving Sunday, we are worried about going hungry today. It is more likely that we are worried about over eating, which is a much greater concern for most of us as opposed to the millions who barely get enough calories to stay well each day. On this Thanksgiving, we contemplate anew whether we have cultivated better attitudes of gratitude than what we were like last October. Do you consider yourself a grateful person? What would you spouse or children or friends say to you about this? Are you quick to be thankful and slow to be judgmental and critical, or do you tend to be the other way around? These are some of the ongoing deeper questions about how we view our lives.

Jesus teaches us to have our minds and hearts bent toward God's opinion, God's desires, God's love, and as we are bent in that direction, our worries are conquered and a greater sense of perspective comes into view. It's hard to be mean and impatient while being grateful. It's hard to be unkind or crooked in our comments toward others if we are looking at how we might build them up or say that we appreciate for this or that reason.

Gratitude is one of the few things we can control in our day to day living. We cannot control how others talk to us, or treat us. We cannot control how others behave or whether they choose healthy or unhealthy activities. But we can control our own reactions. We can look for the good and be grateful. It's hard not to react to those attitudes and words and actions that have pushed our buttons in the past. Looking at how drivers drive is one of my button pushing areas. I go nuts when I see what is happening. And I probably drive others nuts with some of the things I do while at the wheel.

But again as we consider what it means to be grateful for the huge freedom cars bring us, in spite of increasing traffic or crazy driving habits, we focus on the good. I'm not very good at seeing the good, in me, in others, in our church, in our community. Sometimes I see it, but most often I see the depravity, I hear the news of what broken individuals do to each other, which in order to be newsworthy usually shows the darker side of how humans treat one another.

Paul writes to Timothy about his prayer life, in terms of petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving. You'll note we usually begin with our services with the first two, approaching God, confessing sins, petition is about talking to God about ourselves, about our relationship with God, and crying out for mercy. The other prayers are simply to remember everything that God has done for us through Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator, the One who brings us true life, not just physical existence, but true spiritual life. So we start our service with prayers that bring us to God and remind us we come into this life as a gift from God, not a right or a demand, or something taken for granted.

And then at the end of our services on Sundays, we have prayers of thanksgiving and intercessions. Intercession simply means prayers for others. Thanksgiving simply means cultivating a true spirit of gratitude. Because we don't want to treat God as a celestial Santa Claus, i.e., only giving Him the lists of what we want under the tree. We want all of who He is in our lives and the fullness of what that means.

So we take time in our services for prayer, not just me praying or me trying to correct or inform your theology, your understanding of God. I want you to have time to experience God, and not just on Sunday morning, but throughout the week. As a child, Bugs Bunny taught me at times more than what I was receiving at home in terms of prayer. Yosemite Sam would say, "Say your prayers, varmit" to the rabbit. I think that was more or less the family teaching on praying. Perhaps you too received the prayer as a child, "If I die, before I wake..." I didn't focus on that part very much, but rather entrusting myself to Jesus, and desiring the best for my mom and dad and brothers and friends, even if they were hurting me.

The place of prayer is a place for cultivating gratitude. You know we are coming to the Thanksgiving Table soon. And you also may already know that I'm not talking so much about what some in the media call "Turkey Day." I am talking about this table. This large table is a constant reminder for us to be thankful. We have placed some things out in the open to remember how much we have, whether the fishery, or our gardens, whether it is the farmers who produce extraordinary amounts of fresh food, or these lovely grapes. I just have to stop for a moment and say "thank you" to Carole Anne Coffey who gave these grapes, which are grown outside in St. John's, not in a hothouse, as a picture of celebration, a picture of what Jesus

did for us in what we could not do for ourselves. He was crushed for us as the grapes were crushed for the juice. We celebrate with a tiny bit of bread and less than a sip of grape juice.

We celebrate the Eucharist, the Thanksgiving, here at the Thanksgiving Table. Now your own tables at home are also a place to give thanks for the huge abundance we continue to have. But it is also clear that this large piece of furniture with the communion sets from several churches, from many generations, attest to God's faithfulness to this community of faith we now call St. David's Church.

We come and simply are grateful today. Let your heart pour out as much and as detailed thankful comments to God today, as you are able to give. As you hold the elements, say "yes" anew to God, "yes" to God's work in your heart and mind and "yes" to God's community made real and practical here in this place with these people.

Let us pray.