

Thanksgiving Day Sermon 2010 “More Than Food.”

The most recent news about Thanksgiving Day is that more and more store chains will be open today, including some Walmart stores, so that “cashiers won’t be trampled on Black Friday” This beats reports of some stores opening up at midnight on Black Friday-- and making a pajama party out of it!

Well, I know that it’s a big leap from there to the Gospel today where Jesus says “Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life.” (I should be careful how I quote that scripture, because there is an increasing call on Manna Food Center and other food pantries both in the District and Montgomery County this fall.)

But is life more than food for you? I confess that my personal memories have not been about the difficult times of the Pilgrims or the harsh realities of hunger in hard times still smoldering around us. My immediate recall of Thanksgiving Day always jumps back to— food on the table. Thanksgiving in my own Depression days was always at my grandparents’ house, We waited for my granddad when he was asked if he wanted pumpkin or mincemeat pie for dessert and he would always answer...”YES!”

Then there was my first Thanksgiving away from home and in the Army, with a huge Thanksgiving dinner at Fort Belvoir at noon and then taking the bus and streetcar to Christ Church in Georgetown for another big dinner with the rector’s family. Was I stuffed! Even later in Korea. With artillery fire in the air, we had a big Thanksgiving dinner; and decades later my memories still go back to food—I have even been known to eat various recipes for turnips on Thanksgiving Day!

Charlie Brown’s Thanksgiving on TV is still a perennial favorite, but far more people will be watching the Macy’s parade while WE go to church. Then there is one or both of the NFL games before, through and after the feast day of Thanksgiving dinner. But first on this national holiday I’m grateful to be worshiping here with you this morning, sharing in communion together in the service we name as Holy Eucharist—Holy Thanksgiving.

I think this touches the spiritual hunger that men and women have always had, even back to the biblical festival of Sukkoth the “Feast of Booths” from

days of Moses. Yes, our Thanksgiving Day history goes back that far. But perhaps it's worth noting that the booths, or tabernacles of the "Festival of Sukkoth" were **temporary huts**, erected to celebrate God's presence with his people on their way to the Promised Land--- which they never completely found.

And so we celebrate today a Thanksgiving Day which still has a quality of "not yet" about it. The best thing I think we can do this morning is to think of the day as one to cultivate an "attitude of gratitude", and then to link that attitude, that spirit, to the way we actually live, coupling "thanks" to our response with "giving."

Right after the Nicene Creed this morning we will say together the beautiful "Litany of Thanksgiving." The Prayer Book rubrics call for its "optional use" on Thanksgiving Day, but also note that it can be used any Sunday. I suggest that we might use it **ANY** day, to get us back into an "attitude of gratitude". Such an attitude is not easy for many of us because it's so easy to take our good lives for granted. It's not easy because we are never really satisfied; we are always yearning for **More**.

In recent years we thought that "**More**" meant "keeping up with the Jones'", and then the Jones' get refinanced and move out to a bigger house, and we want a bigger one too. But we know that that's not so easy any more. Things have certainly changed for many of us.

So I hope you're here today to become more aware that the sentiment of a typical THANKSgiving Day must be coupled with **Giving**. Otherwise it is **just** a sentiment, and Christianity is not just a "feel good" religion. It can't be if we remember where we came from, worshipping a homeless child who was born in a stable and who gave his life, that we might live. It can't be, as we ponder the words of a Savior who expressed in different ways always the same truth "if an individual wants to receive, then he or she must give. If you want to find your life, you must give it away."

What will be for us tomorrow on what they call Black Friday, the traditional beginning of the Christmas shopping hustle? Each of us in our thanks for God's amazing abundance must decide how much we are willing to give back in response to the needs of others. *True* thanksgiving is only complete when it has in it a giving of ourselves. If we are thankful for freedom we must find ways to show active concern for those who still wear

the chains of poverty or prejudice or social injustice. The art of thanksgiving means ultimately: “*no appreciation without reciprocation*”.

All of this is more than I would be thinking about if Thanksgiving were just a national holiday for just a parade, and football games, Christmas ads and—most of all-- a big dinner. The Gospel question is still, “is not life more than food?” I’m still learning to **live** the answer and hopefully you are too.

That’s why on this Thanksgiving Day I pray that each of us will remember the true source of the blessings that keep coming to us. I pray that a sense of gratitude will fill our days so that we will link our memories and traditions to **thanks=living**, for a world filled with more possibilities because we have been **motivated** by our gratitude to find ways to give, so that others may live.

That answer to our prayer will be the peace that passes all understanding. May that Peace fill our hearts this Thanksgiving morning! AMEN