

KEEPING THE THANKS IN THANKSGIVING

Sermon for Thanksgiving

LPC, 11/27/14

Have you ever heard of the ACTS prayer—A-C-T-S? It's an easy reminder for people who like to say daily personal prayers. A is for Adoration. C is for Confession. T is for Thanksgiving and S is for Supplication. The idea is that in order to have a well-rounded, healthy, adult prayer life, your daily prayer should include something from each category.

In my experience, people have the least trouble with Supplication. This is the prayer where you ask God for something: typically healing for a loved one, or for someone on your prayer list. Some divide Supplication into two categories: intercession and petition. Intercession is where you ask something for someone else and intercession is where you ask something for yourself.

If we're very disciplined, we may make a daily confession. If we go to church regularly, at least here in the Episcopal Church, we have a corporate confession every week. Church is also where we do most of our adoration. Most of our hymns are about adoration, praising or contemplating God's greatness and love. But our private prayer also benefits greatly from adoration, and we do well to include adoration in our daily prayer.

Today we are concerned with thanksgiving. Giving thanks is a regular part of the private lives of many Christians. We say grace before meals. At the conclusion of a meeting or prayer session, at least when we're together, we typically give thanks for the time spent together, or the work accomplished, or just for God's attention.

Since thanksgiving is, or should be, a part of our lives every day, why have a special day for thanksgiving? Well, there's the civil aspect, where we remember a part of our country's history—the pilgrims and the native Americans and such. That's not primarily my interest in this holiday today.

My interest is in the practice, the responsibility, the privilege, the discipline, the joy of simply giving thanks to God, which is something of which, as I look around, I don't think any of us does enough. No matter how faithfully we include thanksgiving in our daily prayer (and I have to admit I'm not even that faithful in this myself) we probably can't thank God enough for what God gives us, which is everything. So setting aside a day as a reminder to give thanks always and everywhere seems like a really good idea to me!

Not to rush Christmas, but a comparison between Thanksgiving and Christmas may be useful here. You know how people say, "Keep the Christ in Christmas"? I'm suggesting that we keep the Thanks in Thanksgiving. The people who want to keep Christ in Christmas do not want commercial and other interests to co-opt Christmas. How about we likewise refuse to let commercial and other interests define Thanksgiving for us? Thanksgiving is not primarily a parade or an enormous meal, or a shopping opportunity.

I am all in favor of keeping Christ in Christmas and Thanks in Thanksgiving. At this juncture I would however like to offer a caveat: in the case of both Thanksgiving and Christmas, if our attention is on how other people are doing it wrong, we're not doing it right either.

It's perfectly possible for each of us to keep the Thanks in Thanksgiving and the Christ in Christmas despite what's going on around us. As a matter of fact, the very best witness is to remain peacefully, serenely, thankful and reverent in the midst of all the craziness that surround us. We do have a choice about whether or not we let the craziness get to us. We do have a choice to be grateful. We do have a choice to open our hearts to God.

We can, of course, choose to grumble and complain. That's what free will is all about. It's not as if grumbling and complaining don't have their rewards. If they didn't, we wouldn't do those things. But I guarantee we're happier if we choose, instead, giving thanks to God.

Remember that Garden of Eden story? Despite what the biblical literalists would have you believe, it's not about an apple at all. It's about choosing the wrong thing. Sure you can choose the wrong thing. It might even feel good for a little bit. But it won't make you happy in the end.

God wants us to be happy. God invites our thanks not because God needs to be thanked but because God knows that thanksgiving makes us happy.

Remember that God has a choice too. Since we are made in God's image, having choice is one way humans reflect God's image. So God has a choice. And God chooses to give us all we have: this beautiful world, our lives, our families, and the company of others to support us. God even chose to send us God's Son. God chooses to love us. God chooses to save us from ourselves. If those are the sorts of choices God makes, it follows what kind of choices we creatures in God's image must make.

Let us be happy. Let us give thanks. Let this special day of thanksgiving remind us, always and everywhere, to give thanks to our God.