

SERMON

“GIVE THANKSGIVING TO GOD”

I hope you are having a great Thanksgiving weekend! Thanksgiving is a religious holiday. The first Thanksgiving was a religious event. The pilgrims were very devout people. They started out for the New World running from religious oppression. They considered themselves the people of God. They were called puritans because they tried to purify the Church of all worldly influences. When they sat down for that first Thanksgiving meal, their thoughts were on God. Half of the colonists died that first winter. But with the help of the Native Americans, they had enough food to keep them fed through the 2nd winter.

In many ways Thanksgiving has become a national holiday. It is seen as the day to celebrate the great wealth of our nation. But it is also an opportunity to look back at our national heritage and celebrate how far we've come.

Our nation began with people who wished to be able to live their own lives freely. They weren't the rich or powerful. They were the ones that the other countries of the world didn't mind sending to the new world to die. And many of them did die. But look how far we've come. Those tattered groups of settlers who barely hung on from year to year has become the greatest country on earth. A country where people can speak their minds. We aren't perfect. But as Americans we enjoy freedoms that people in other parts of the world can only dream of. By third world standards even the poor in America are rich.

But in all this national celebration we need to be careful that we don't lose sight of the original intent of Thanksgiving. It began as a way to celebrate what God has done. And it's still about what God has done for us. It is about giving credit to God for the blessings we have.

On the threshold of a new nation, the pilgrims stopped and gave thanks. They acknowledged from the beginning it was God who made their freedom possible. And it was God who had blessed them with food to get through the winter. It's not because life was perfect. It wasn't. They were in a strange land with an unsure future. Half the people died the first year. This wasn't a promised

land by Biblical standards. It was rugged but it was rich. But they were blessed with freedom. And with the help of their Native American neighbors, they would learn how to cultivate the land.

We too often forget about the blessings in the midst of our worries. Instead of seeing the glass as half-full we worry about it being half-empty. We worry about having nicer and newer things. We are distraught because the economy isn't doing as well as we'd like. We can focus on our aches and pains rather than on what our bodies can do.

Giving thanks is a learned behavior. It's not something that comes naturally. We have tried hard to get Kurt to learn to say thank you. If someone gives him a gift we say, "Now, say thank you!" If we pass the salt at the table we say, "Now, say thank you!" I remember after years of training one day hearing Kurt say, "Thank you!" Those unsolicited thank yous more than make up for all the unspoken thank yous we've never received.

Like so many of us Kurt has been relatively taken care of his whole life. Kids are used to that and can take it for granted. Kids need to be taught. If you never learned how to say thank you now is the time. It will make you a happier and a better person. Make sure to teach your children. It will make them better people.

With most blessings we forget to say thank you. It's impossible to keep up. 9 times out of 10 we just go on our way. We need at least one day a year to intentionally thank God. We should every day, but it's good to set this weekend apart to give thanks.

We will be celebrating communion in a minute. Another word for communion is Eucharist. Eucharist is the Greek word for "to give thanks." As you come up the altar this morning think about all you have to be thankful for. Thank God for the blessings. And not just the ones you know about but the ones that haven't even happened yet!

AMEN.