



This upcoming Thanksgiving holiday is going to be...rather different, to say the least, for many families across this country. The decisions to be made are incredibly heart-wrenching: it's not that grown-children and parents do not want to see each other, but they love each other so much that they do not want to risk even the slightest coronavirus chance at all. Others will find ways to make it work spaced-out, masks-on, because they need that time together for their own mental and spiritual health. For others, lest we forget, this Thanksgiving will not be that much different, as they remain on their own for whatever the reason may be. Regardless, this Thanksgiving may not have quite the same picturesque homey feel that we often crave this time of year.

Several years ago, I was not down on the farm for the usual holiday festivities with loved ones. Instead, I was with another family near the town I was living in at that time. And no, it was not the same. It felt weird not being around my parents, my siblings, my nieces and nephews with a pack of dogs running around, and the picturesque rural landscape through the dining room windows. It was not the same at all. It almost didn't feel like Thanksgiving whatsoever, as if that day of soothing comfort and energizing joy could not possibly happen anywhere else throughout this country besides the place I called home.

Nevertheless, this family celebrated around a table in their dining room as well with plenty of nostril-tantalizing food and just as much laughter and as bright of smiles as there were on the farm I adored hundreds of miles away. However, these people did something different. I had heard about this tradition being done in other houses across the country on the National Day of Thanksgiving, but it never happened in ours that I could remember. Regardless, before they started digging into the most enticing entrees and side dishes, they went around the table, asking each person to name something they were thankful for on that day of thanks-giving.

Again, this might have been the norm for other families, but it was not for me. It felt weird, at first, as people listed off the usual thanking-for subjects: having a job, a home, and, of course, the begging-to-be-eaten food in front of us. And then, we got to the host of the evening festivities, and she started to break down in tears. She was thankful for her brother, who had finally made it home after being in prison for years. I did not know the back-story at all, but all of a sudden the holiday weirdness transformed into a most awe-inspiring holy moment, taking Thanksgiving to a whole 'nother level that I had never realized was possible in all the late November celebrations I had experienced in years past.

I could not help but think of that very Thanksgiving Day when considering the verse from the Psalm this morning: "Our sins are stronger than we are, but you blot out our transgressions." That, regardless of what happened with their brother, their son, a husband, a father, he was still going to be welcomed back to that very table. Their love was going to be fuller than that table covered with all the food and plates and everything else. He made a mistake, he served his time, but he was still their brother, their son, a husband, a father. At that moment, I was thankful to see the power of forgiveness, of grace, of real-life boundless love on that National Day of

Thanksgiving, as if the holiday can truly be celebrated all over this country, regardless of circumstances.

In their own incredible way, they brought to life the very core of the Gospel. “Our sins [may very well be] stronger than we are, but [God insists on] blot[ting] out our transgressions,” so that they will not define our life in the eyes of God, yes, but also to ensure that they will not keep us from God’s table, either. Of course, we church-goers would say that God’s table is this very altar, where God sets the bread of life and the wine of forgiveness before us every time we gather for worship together as a family in Christ, and give thanks to God far more than just once a year. However, it may just be that the carpenter’s son set a table in our very hearts with the endless helpings of grace and hope and unstoppable love no matter the mistakes we make, no matter the sin committed.

This Thanksgiving will be different for far too many families, to say the least. And yet, it will absolutely be no different at all for the most incredible hospitality that has already been unveiled to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. No matter how dismal we may feel this season, no matter our level of hope, no matter the actions we wish we could take back what we did or did not do this year, it’s not that God invited us in; it’s that God has already escorted us to the table, to take our seat of honor, set by our most gracious host in a humble carpenter, and yet Son of God, whose love remains just the same in 2020 as it was on Calvary thousands of years ago; the kind of love that will never kick us out from the table of the most amazing grace beyond our wildest imagination. For that Greatest News of all, not just this week, but throughout our lives, we give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!