

THANKSGIVING/GRATITUDE!

Another year is quickly winding to a close, and this is the week of Thanksgiving, that most American of Holidays that we celebrate here in the U.S.A. Many of us get out of town to visit friends and relatives. Most of us eat Turkey and all the fixings, in quantities far greater than good health would recommend or Doctors would approve! And we celebrate a National Myth that has continued to develop since the 17th Century! Thanksgiving has long been one of my favorite holidays, probably because of the great feast, the gathering of family, and the opportunity that I had as a youth to play in the annual rain or shine or snow Turkey-Bowl coed touch or flag football game with friends from my church youth group. I have lots of memories from Thanksgivings past, mostly good! Lots of family gatherings! It was over a Thanksgiving weekend that I first introduced Jane to my kids and their mother—that was quite a weekend! Strange that she doesn't want to repeat that journey to see my kids and grandkids!

Anyway, this is the Sunday before Thanksgiving and we have much for which to be grateful! It has been a very mixed year for many of our compatriots. The fires have been calming down, but the losses of life have been horrible. And of course, our fellow citizens in Houston, Puerto Rico, and Florida have been struggling to put their lives back together as assistance has often been slow in coming after Hurricanes and floods took too many lives and even more homes. Amazingly the intensification of storms, drought and fires is pretty much what climate scientists have been predicting for years. Too bad so many people have joined the President in his anti-science crusade. We can celebrate the gains that progressives and especially women and scientists have made in the House but we still have a long way to go.

So here we are in the delta/central valley enjoying a very smoky week preparing for Thanksgiving weekend, which of course includes Black Friday and Cyber Monday! If the opportunity to spend time with family or friends isn't enough excitement, there are endless possibilities to shop in real stores or from the convenience of your digital shopping device wherever you might be! The sales are better than Veteran's Day, President's Day, Labor Day, Memorial Day, 4th of July, and every other sale weekend, which would be every holiday weekend! Just think of all the possibilities for supporting our Capitalist Consumerist modern way of life! Let's keep those corporations and 1%-ers happy!

Oh, sometimes it hits me that I need to spend more time off-grid and away from the TV! Of course, in recent news I heard that my Defibrillator Pacemaker is hackable so if you see me saying or doing strange things, send me to the nearest digital repair team! I certainly am thankful for modern medicine and science, but I am sometimes concerned that Big Brother is doing more than just watching! (Ouch!)

Anyway, Thanksgiving is a time for showing our gratitude for so many good things that we experience. It is a time for appreciating the world and the people around us, and the animals and plants, hills and valleys, mountains and oceans, rivers and streams. Too often we forget how important the natural world is for our very lives. We rely on the trees and other plants to produce the oxygen we breathe and we rely on plants and animals to provide our food. The cycles of water going up into the atmosphere and returning as rain are absolutely essential for human life to have developed and to continue existing on earth. The disruptions that have been influenced by humans in the climate cycles of earth may be putting all life at risk, but the cycles themselves are life-giving and something for which we are and ought to be grateful!

Some recent events have reminded me of the fragility of human and other lives. We are not like the old-growth Redwoods. We are lucky to make it to 80 years. We will not see much more of the unfolding of the future, though we have been able to see a good bit of the past through history books and scientific observations. And amazing things have happened during our lifetimes so far. Television, space travel, jet airplanes, heart, lung, and liver transplants and other medical breakthroughs, computers and all manner of digital devices and communications and entertainment and so many other advances have happened in most of our lifetimes. We live in amazing times and we have so much for which to be thankful. There has been progress in healing and caring for so many injuries and illnesses and premature births, that it has become a terrible tragedy when anyone dies young, and yet the spread of guns and violence and wars seem to increase to surprising levels countering some of the good things. Life is a mixture of joys and sorrows, but we each have so much for which to be grateful!

Philosophers have long argued that we need at least some of the bad things to truly appreciate the good! I don't know if we need evil, or bad things to happen, but they certainly do happen in a world in which some have so much more than they need and so many don't have enough to even get by. There are ways to balance the needs of all, but they tend to be corrupted by those seeking more power and more stuff.

Democratic Socialism does seem to work in many countries, and all the other developed countries in the world seem to at least have socialized medicine so that the cost of health care is not such a burden on the poor and those in the middle. Health care and Education and basic housing and food should be rights for all, not privileges for the wealthy. In so much of the world, these things are guaranteed at some basic level, something society should provide for all. I am grateful that this is true in so many places and I hope that it shall soon be that way in our society,

too. I am grateful to Bernie Sanders for saying what should have been so obvious, and I am glad so many agree!

I am grateful to live in a free society and for having lived long enough to understand her many flaws. I am grateful to hear the broad diversity of opinions but I wish more were supported by facts. I am grateful to live in a state which is more progressive than most, but I wish the cost of living were a bit lower! I am grateful for each of you and for those who came before who built this church and this congregation! I am grateful to live in such a diverse community and to enjoy the variety that it offers. I am glad to live between the ocean and the mountains and to have the opportunity to enjoy both! And I am glad to live close enough to my kids and grandkids to visit them at least a few times each year!

Thanksgiving may have grown out of a too-good-to-be-true myth of harmony between the illegal aliens escaping famine, violence, and religious prohibitions in Europe and the indigenous peoples of America, but it has grown into an opportunity to celebrate the harmony between people holding many different beliefs but each claiming a place in American society. How fitting that we can gather to remember this myth as we fight, I mean Feast with our families, and as we give it the old college try to spend everything we can in sales to prop up the economy!

I hope that this Thanksgiving will be a time of blessing for you and your families and friends. I encourage you to keep in mind all those who are struggling and who have suffered losses in recent days, and I wish you each a Happy Thanksgiving!

I invite you now to share a few of the things for which you are grateful!

Thank You for Sharing! Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!