

THANKSGIVING SUNDAY

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; John 6:25-35

We have a lot to be thankful for. The clothes on our backs that keep us warm, the food in our cupboards that keeps us fed, the houses we live in, as well as the homes that nurture and protect us. In this country we are blessed with a wealth of material and political blessings that people in other countries only dream of.

By third world standards, even the poor in Canada are rich. And we take for granted liberties that are unheard of in some places. We are healthy enough to gather here for worship today, and for that we give thanks.

We should give thank for our family that is a source of strength in our daily life. We should also be thankful for our work life, even though it may have been sometimes challenging and rewarding at others.

With all the news about nuclear war in the past few years, there is something else we can be thankful for. Most of us grew up in the nuclear age. We did drills in school about what to do in case of a nuclear attack. Some had “nuclear dreams” as a youth in which there was a nuclear war and everything was destroyed. The fear of nuclear war was so much a part of our lives that it invaded our dreams. There was even an old movie that depicted the results of a nuclear war. It seemed so unlikely and unreal to us. Yet, we can remember how real and inevitable it had seemed to us. Despite recent threats of nuclear war, we no longer live in a world that is constantly on the verge of blowing itself up. That is not to say some terrorist will not blow up a city.

We certainly do have a lot to be thankful for, but too often we forget all these blessing in the midst of our worries. Instead of seeing that the glass is half full, we worry that it is half empty. We worry about having new and nicer clothes, or better food. We are furious that the cost of living is so high. We focus on our physical pains and disabilities, instead of seeing what we can do. It is good that we set aside one day a year to intentionally give God thanks. We need to periodically remind ourselves that we are blessed. Remember the first Europeans to settle in North America, the pilgrims. They were in a strange land with an unsure future. Famine and disease could strike at any time. But they decided to give thanks. In the midst of their troubles they took time to thank God for the food that would ward off famine for at least one year. And they celebrated with their new found friends, the Indigenous people. We give thanks that they did that because we, who are much more blessed than they, need this holiday to remember our blessings.

We follow the example of the pilgrims, but they were simply following the example of Israel in the Bible. God had brought the children of Israel through hundreds of years of slavery and they were about to embark on settling in a new land. But God told them to always give the first fruits to God as a thanksgiving offering. God knew that the Israelites needed to have a day set aside to give thanks. The pilgrims realized that they also needed to set aside a day to give thanks, even in the face of their hard lives. We, too, need to set aside time to give thanks to God.

As was said earlier, we have a lot to be thankful for: food, clothing, material needs, security, family. But if we stop there we will miss the greater part of the blessings we have. That is what Jesus' followers did. Jesus had recently fed the crowd of 5,000. The disciples who had nothing, were greatly blessed by it.

Their empty stomachs were filled. So the next morning they come back to Jesus seeking more bread.

The disciples were probably thankful for the bread that filled their stomachs, but they failed to see the greater blessing that was present. Jesus was revealing more to them in the breaking of the bread than just free food. He was revealing the source of eternal life.

So Jesus told them: “Don’t waste your time on food which perishes. When you eat earthly bread your stomach aches for more before long. It is a temporary satisfaction. Look up to heaven for the food which God’s Son will give you. That food will nourish your soul to eternal life”.

We also have a treasure trove of spiritual blessings to be thankful for. Just consider the Bible, which is the best seller of all time. Most people own several Bibles, but how many actually read them. The Bible is a treasure chest full of inspiring stories of God and people of faith. We call it “God’s Word”, but do we pay attention to it.

What about the gift of salvation? For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in Him shall have eternal life. Why would the God of the universe love us enough to die in our place? How much do we need to pay Him for such a sacrifice. The answer is nothing, it’s a free gift, all we need to do is trust Him and we are forgiven.

And then there is the gift of assurance. What a blessing to know for sure in our heart that Jesus is ours, that we are His and that our eternal destination is assured. God could have left us in the dark, always wondering, but instead He sent His Son to tell us clearly. What a blessing: to be able to know for sure that we are saved.

We could go on and on with all the spiritual blessing God has

given us: peace, strength, guidance, ministry, to be children of God. We do indeed have much to be thankful for.

Take time this Thanksgiving to give thanks for the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. God gives us eternal life. God also gives us food and clothing and all the necessities of life. We should give thanks for these material blessing and use them to bless others. But let's not overlook the heavenly food that God gives.

Take stock this Thanksgiving of all that God has given us. Don't let Thanksgiving be just a chance to gather together and eat a lot. But remember that we have the opportunity to feast every day on the blessings of eternal life. Because we know Christ, we shall never hunger or thirst for heavenly bread. Thank God, on this Thanksgiving Day, for all His gifts and blessings!

AMEN.