

Thanksgiving 2010 Sermon
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Half of the colony
had died during the first winter
for the colonists in Massachusetts.
And yet the summer
found hope growing
right along side
the new crop of corn.

The settlers found themselves
overflowing with gratitude
for things formerly
taken for granted.

The corn crop had led
to a brand new bread
called corn bread
which was delicious
and plentiful.

Corn cakes were also eaten
and the geese, duck
, wild turnkey and venison
were stocking the larders
next to dried and fresh fish.

They learned how to survive
not only from their wits
and ingenuity but from
the natives who showed them
how to use fish scraps
as fertilizer for crops
and how to plant
the indigenous plants,
and what berries were
safe for eating.

As the summer ended
and another winter loomed,
the contrast to the previous year's
scarcity and sorrow
was so great that the governor
of the Plymouth Colony

called for a great thanksgiving,
a three day feast that would
celebrate God's goodness and bounty
in feasting and prayer.

Believe it or not,
this first thanksgiving
happened not in November
but on July 30, 1623.

The idea caught on
and other New England settlements
began to celebrate a day
of feasting and giving thanks to God
for his abundance.

It wasn't until 1789,
when we were a free nation,
that our first President
issued a proclamation naming
November 26 a day
of American Thanksgiving.

The idea was not nationally adopted
until 1863, however, when President Lincoln
Declared that the last Thursday
in November would be
"a day of thanksgiving and
praise to our beneficent Father."

For the next 75 years,
each President would issue
the same decree
until finally in 1941 congress
ruled that the fourth Thursday
of November would be
a legal federal holiday.

Walter Brueggemann says that
"During November we reach
the conclusion of the church year.
We remember our dead
and ponder the God of life.

We begin Advent and the season
of alert waiting for the newness

that God will give.

Between, in American
 "civil religion," is Thanksgiving.
 Perhaps thanksgiving
 is the right segue
 from old to new.

It's appropriate that the great
 festival of gratitude
 should provide the transition
 from old to new.
 Gratitude is, in the life of faith,
 for *every* season."

The story of the first thanksgiving
 Is for the American people
 What the story of manna in the wilderness
 Was and is still for the Hebrew people.
 It is the same story that recalls
 The crowd of thousands being
 Fed from a few loaves and fish.

It is the story of God's abundant presence.
 It is the story of God's loving relationship
 with his children
 and his providence
 and desire that they be
 filled only with good things.

There is an old table blessing
 That goes like this:
 Oh Thou the sustainer
 Of our bodies, hearts, and souls
 Bless all that we thankfully receive.

Perhaps because we are creatures
 Who must be fed,
 Who are governed by the natural need
 To provide nourishment and sustenance
 For our bodies to continue to run
 We often think of thankfulness to God
 When we are at table.

We often feel gratitude most deeply
 When we are fed

after a time of starvation and need.
And yet God desires to feed
more than our bodies
and provides more for us
than those physical things
necessary for our survival.

In our gospel Jesus looks at the crowd
And their sudden love for him
And tells them they are following him
Not because he is God's servant
But because they have filled their
Bellies with unexpected bread.

He tells them
"Do not work for the food that perishes,
but for the food that
endures for eternal life,
which the Son of Man
will give you.
For it is on him
that God the Father
has set his seal."

Jesus tells us still
that he has nourishment for us
that can come only from him,
if we will only receive it.

Another table blessing addresses this very need:

We feel hungry, but we do not starve.
We eat until stuffed,
but still have empty hearts.
So grant that our fellowship of food
may become also a banquet of the Spirit,
And fill us, O God, with Yourself. Amen

The fellowship of food
is necessarily a banquet.
A banquet that requires
More than one
to share the meal
and offer thanks.

Giving thanks can be a private matter,

But the celebration of Thanksgiving
is a communal affair.
That is why we gather
at church on this day
because, as *Bruce Epperly* says,

“Thanksgiving is the virtue
of abundance.
It looks at life
in terms of possibility.
It imagines a meal
for a multitude
in five loaves and two fish.
It visualizes a few
civil rights marchers
taking the first steps
to equal protection
for all Americans.

It believes that pausing
a moment to reach out,
at just the right time,
can transform
a person’s life.

As the adage goes,
even when we didn’t
have money,
we weren’t poor:
we were abundant
in dreams,
love, and relationships.

As chaos theory notes,
the flapping of a butterfly’s wings
can influence weather
across the country
and so can acts
of grateful generosity
done over and over again.

Thanksgiving turns us
from individualism
to community
and to wider and wider
circles of care.”

As the Community of Christ's followers,
It is only natural
that we see the table
as the place
to bring our gratitude.

The table is where
prayers are offered,
where lives are linked,
communion shared.

This day we not only
Give thanks for
The bread of the world,
But we come in desperate need
For the bread of life.

This bread that takes
The yawning ache
of loneliness, isolation,
restlessness, faithlessness,
foolishness and stubbornness
and fills us instead
with the comfort food
of a life lived with God.

Jesus says " I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me
will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me
will never be thirsty."

And so, this day
we give thanks
For bread.
For food,
And Family,
table fellowship
and the comfort of home.

And we give thanks for
for the bread of life,
for the chewiness
of a life of intentional faith,
for the fiber that keeps of strong,

for the love of God.
The sacrifice of Christ
and the companionship
of the Holy Spirit
as we gather at
the Lord's table
in gratitude for the
blessings of our life.
Amen.