

Thanksgiving October 10, 2021 - LFLC

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Thanksgiving has changed. Until 2 years ago, you could pretty much guess what the service would be like. There would be squash on the Table and baskets of cabbage, carrots, potatoes, apples – and flowers aplenty.

It was also a strain in urban congregations to connect emotionally to the season. After all, the supermarkets were full of these fruits and vegetables 24/7 all year. We would spend time empathizing with farmers but were more worried about the deer in our gardens eating the tops off our flowers.

My father was a farmer and a long time Elder in our Congregation. He never missed a Sunday – but every Thanksgiving Sunday he would think about digging potatoes before the killer frost arrived. He never did but he was antsy in Church that day.

This is a North American Holiday in many respects, but Linda and I found it interesting that Malawians loved this day of the year, and the Churches would be resplendent in fruits and vegetables, all of which would be delivered to the poor after Church. One Sunday, I had not only a few chickens clucking along but a man arrived a bit late with a tethered goat. During my sermon, his bleats were superior to mine.

But this year . . . well, you know the story. We are happy to at least be able to join together; but we feel a bit tethered by masks and other restrictions put in place for our general safety.

COVID; alarming reports on Climate Change; Forest Fires, Droughts, Floods; disappearing fish stocks – on and on.

We give thanks to God for the harvest, for good food and the blessings of our health care workers; for vaccines and – generally speaking – the cooperation of most citizens in trying to halt the spread of the Virus.

Yes – thanksgiving – **but what about the anxiety that goes along with it this year?**

In the Hebrew Bible, climate and harvests seemed to be a tool that God used to bless or punish. In Joel we heard about a time when God actually repents of sending famine and now blesses the people with an abundance of food.

We moderns have trouble thinking of God in this way – of tinkering with climate to punish or bless.

But for me, my deepest fear is rather the absence of God – those times when God allows us to face the consequences of our own actions – when we truly reap what we have sown.

We in the Developed World have made material prosperity the golden ring which we all pursue. Attain that and everything falls into place – except it doesn't. **Jesus knew that and so do we.**

It is interesting to hear Jesus speak about our anxieties over food, drink and clothing. He could have included the Dow Jones, Inflation and Unemployment rates . . . cost of a Tesla.

Think of the context: Israelites were poor – probably 90% were classified as poor; few would live past 40; food was plain and often scarce; life depended on the harvest, on the sheep and goats staying healthy, the trees and the vines producing.

And when you had a good harvest, the Roman soldiers could simply take it from you.

And the religious elites were more worried about how you washed your hands rather than what you put into them.

And Jesus says, “Don't Worry!” Is he serious? Don't be anxious when a rich man stole my sheep to feed his guests?

I often get immersed in the beauty of this passage – the birds of the air and flowers of the field – God's tender provenance.

Yet don't forget the context – who was hearing these words and the radical implications of them.

On my mother's side, I descend from generations of professional worriers – I have inherited that tendency although I ask for the grace to overcome it. Worry not only steals joy but denies it.

Pride goeth before a fall, I heard more than once growing up.

God helps those who help themselves – I think I was in my 20's before I realized that was not in the Bible. In other words, this chatter about grace is mainly for the birds and the bees, We gotta work!

So is Jesus inviting us to a life of indolence? Do we opt for the grasshopper over the ant when it comes to preparing for winter?

There is something more. Jesus says, “Strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”

The Prophet Micah put it this way: What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God?

Seems like a good place to start. The purpose of life is not to make a fortune, to be first, to get ahead.

It is not having the best of everything – life is not primarily about economics.

It is interesting that this Covid Virus has brought to the fore issues we have tried to ignore:

Indigenous Rights; Racism; Inequalities; - the general injustice of societies that put money as the highest value.

We still uphold kindness – but we are often kind to those we know and love – Canadians are not as kind as they were 50 years ago when it comes to the needs of the Developing World. Among the OECD we are near the bottom of givings based on our GNP.

And the Prophet does not say to walk humbly behind your God but with your God.

Can we not glimpse the humility of God so displayed in Jesus?

Can we imagine a gentle God, compassionate and longing for our Shalom?

The God who gave us freedom and will not take it away?

God is happy for us to see God's handiwork in creation. And just when extinction is rising, we are beginning to glimpse the joy of the creatures – even the feelings of the plants – all these hidden blessings we overlook when we run to be first, richest, most popular.

This Thanksgiving, I invite you to slow down and trust the mercies of God who provides all we need.

In that trust lives our hope; in that trust comes love; in that trust joy breaks forth.

Our God is glorious, eternal, righteous and just – but maybe a bit shy of the cameras.

God leaves it to us, in Jesus' name, and by the leading of the Spirit, to **live faithful lives that make the goodness of God obvious to those with eyes to see.**

And for this, grace is given so let us be thankful!