

Thankful for God's Continuing Care

As we approached Thanksgiving weekend, I was curious what Jesus has to say about giving thanks.

Reading through the gospels we hear that Jesus give thanks:
during the Last Supper (Lk 22:14-23, Mk 14:22-25, Mt 26:26-29)
before feeding the 4000 and 5000 (Mt 15:36, Mk 8:6, Jn 6: 11)
before asking for Lazarus to be raised from the dead (Jn 11:41)
after the 70 disciples returned from their first mission trip and are giving their field reports (Lk 10:21, Mt 11)
when Jesus broke bread with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24).

Jesus spoke about giving thanks, in the parable of the healing of the ten lepers and only one returns to give thanks (Lk 17:11-19). It is clear that giving thanks was important to Jesus.

I am pretty sure that Jesus gave thanks every time he went up the mountain or to a deserted place to pray to his father. Giving thanks was part of the prayer that Jesus gave the apostles when they asked him to teach them to pray.

We also know that Jesus was an observant Jew, respected by many as a rabbi or teacher, and that he participated in all the Jewish festivals, often going up to Jerusalem to the temple.

One of the major festivals of the Jewish faith is Sukkot, or the harvest festival, or also known as the festival of the huts. The date of the festival moves around a bit in our calendar because it is based on the lunar calendar. This year it is October 6-13. Tomorrow, our Thanksgiving Day in Canada is the last day of the Jewish harvest festival week this year. A week of celebrating the harvest sounds rather wonderful to me.

Many of the instructions for Sukkot are found in the Book of Deuteronomy, so, we look to our Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy.

This is part of Moses last talk to the people of Israel. Having spent 40 years as nomads crossing the Sinai desert after their escape from slavery in Egypt, and overlooking the promised land, Moses knew that he would not enter, Moses gives the people instructions as they learn to live a settled life in the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey

They are to take the first of all the fruits of the land they are given and they are to take it to the priest to place before the altar, and then they are to recite the story of their deliverance from slavery.

Presenting the offering of fruits of the harvest gives thanks for what they have been given by God and the recitation of the deliverance story, connects together their past, present and future. It is something that they continue to do to this day.

It reminds them of God's care of the people of Israel, past, present and future.

As we bring our gifts to the altar, we can recall our story. We can take a moment to recall those who have gone before us.

They may be treasured friends, beloved relatives or others who have left their mark on our own lives and the life of our community.

The ones whose pictures hang on the walls, and the ones who quietly got the work done – baking cookies, washing dishes and raking leaves.

We can recall the past events that have shaped us.

The successes and the struggles
the arguments and the celebrations,
the mundane and the extraordinary.

The events within the community and those from beyond our walls that have impacted
and influenced the community.

These people and events are a witness to the arc of God's continual care and love, to God's grace
and gifts, to us and our community.

Our story comes at many levels.

The personal individual stories of us and our families, where we have come from, what
we have experienced.

Our story as being part of the followers of Christ,
of a people of Israel crossing into the promised land,
of Jesus, born as a baby, living among us and dying for us,
of Christianity through the ages,
and of our Anglican expression of faith.

Our story as members of the community of St Andrews,
whether for a short time or a life time,
from its founding 76 years ago
the individuals and groups who have formed us into our parish community today,
the leaders and the followers.

To be able to offer the fruits of the harvest is a privilege that comes from being settled and
having access to fertile ground. Having a place to call home long enough to grow and
harvest crops in a wonderful gift.

So, as we make our offering and give thanks,
we recall and give thanks for those who have gone before us
we recall our stories – as Christian, as community and as individuals and families,
we recall God's continuing care.

In a few minutes we will join in a special thanksgiving with Carl and Maureen as they give
thanks for their marriage of 50 years and renew their marriage vows.

We give thanks for Carl and Maureen being part of our community, part of our story,
for their faithful witness and support of each other through the years.

May God's blessing be with them in the rest of their life together.

It is fitting to recall the closing verse of Psalm 100:

For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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