

Homily by The Rev'd William Roberts, Rector St Mark's NOTL
Harvest thanksgiving October 9, 2017

O abundant God you have given us many things, give us also thankful hearts, Amen

So I hope your turkeys are getting stuffed, your tables getting set, and your time this Harvest Thanksgiving weekend with family and friends is a joyous one.

For we do live in a kind of promised land don't we? To hear the words from Deuteronomy written 3000 years ago describes us in Niagara on the Lake:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills. A land of barley, vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey a land where you eat bread without scarcity where you will lack nothing. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you."

But we must also this Thanksgiving take care not to miss verse 11 where it says *"take care that you do not forget the Lord your God by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances and his statutes"*.

Because with the Thanksgiving for fruits of the harvest come also our responsibilities and obligations to keep the statutes of stewardship given by the Lord.

Now for our Jewish friends Thanksgiving feast is celebrated in the Passover - you know the story of the angel of the Lord passing over the houses marked with sacrificial blood of lambs to then escape from slavery and oppression the Passover leads them to give thanks not so much harvest but for freedom. And the promise land only be claimed from remembering the God who awakens in us an abundance of liberty at the responsibilities we have to remember the laws of love of God and love one another. If we fail to keep these laws, forget these obligations then we lose the promised land

Now for us Christians and especially those of us from the Church of England and the Anglican Church we have two ways of celebrating Thanksgiving

The first is this annual Thanksgiving for harvest for the beauty of the earth for those who sow abundantly shall reap abundantly as we read in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. And here at St. Marks we are reaping abundantly.

But the second way we celebrate Thanksgiving is borrowed from our Jewish friends and their feast of the Passover. This is our weekly Thanksgiving sharing as we do bread and wine and communion. This meal we call Eucharist and Eucharist comes from the Greek word for Thanksgiving 'eucharistio' - to give thanks.

In the Eucharistic prayers The Prayers of Great Thanksgiving we use over the bread and wine just count the number of times the word thanks and thanksgiving is used. In one it is used 12 times.

So we give thanks weekly for the freedom as followers of Jesus, and we give thanks annually for the land we are given and the Earth's bountiful harvest all around us

But there is also a third lesson for us today about giving thanks and it is found in Jesus's meeting of the 10 lepers. A lot is going on in this story from Luke's Gospel. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to his trial and death on a cross. He is going through the no mans land of Samaria hopeless place of conflict between Jews and Samaritans in the hills. And then Jesus meets these lepers who are full of contagion and disease far from the cleanliness and purity laws of his people. So here is Jesus in the worst of all places, and the worst of all times, with the worst of all people.

On the surface of it, this story is about the 10 who are healed and only one who comes back to say thank you. It is usually interpreted as a story of ingratitude, failure to give thanks for all we have because in our busyness and our preoccupations we forgot to return and say thank you.

But instead of seeing this story has one of guilt and ingratitude let's learn about what a double blessing what double healing is received by the one who did return to thank Jesus. This interpretation focuses on the spiritual nature of blessings of gratitude not the individual guilt of ingratitude.

For yes - for the one who came back, his physical infirmity, his bodily disease of leprosy was healed and he was physically clean. But in this return encounter with Jesus ,with what we see in the Passover and what we celebrate in the Eucharist, gave him also a spiritual healing a deeper love and appreciation for God and his neighbour. It is like us coming to the altar rail not just for physical healing in a clean Church but for encounter with the divine - and being embraced by wholeness. Jesus tells him your faith has made you not just well but whole in body, mind and spirit.

More about this next week as we celebrate St. Luke the position and focus on healing and caring in and spirit

But today in this annual Harvest Thanksgiving weekend, and in this weekly Eucharist of Great Thanksgiving come for a double blessing. Come to say thanks be to God for indescribable gifts, and experience the wholeness of loving God, our neighbour and ourselves - for the beauty of the physical Earth and love of a spiritual God incarnate in our life through Jesus Christ our Lord of the lepers.

Happy Thanksgiving, and blessed be us all. Amen