

St. Columba's Episcopal Church  
Thanksgiving Day – November 25, 2021  
“Reflections on Giving Thanks to God”  
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

Thanksgiving Day is now, as you know, a largely secular holiday that was begun as a special religious holiday dedicated to giving thanks to God for the blessings of the harvest and for God's help in the past year. It is good to take a few minutes here in church to reflect on gratitude to God. A friend of mine, a faithful church woman, once shared with me a thought-provoking question regarding gratitude that she had read: “What if you woke up today with only the things you thanked God for yesterday?” I don't know about you, but I'd wake up to a life that was missing many, many blessings that I simply take for granted.

“What if you woke up today with only the things you thanked God for yesterday?” This question is useful because it can help us see both all that we have to be thankful for and how we fall short in giving thanks to God. In a few minutes we will pray “A Litany of Thanksgiving” (The Book of Common Prayer, page 837). I would encourage you to take your service leaflet with you and use this litany in your prayers at home. Take time to really think about how these words of thanksgiving apply to your life, your experience. I'm sure this practice will help you deepen your gratitude to God.

As Christians, we believe that it is right to give thanks to God, that thanksgiving is an essential part of our life of faith and of prayer. But we don't expect that God will “punish” our ingratitude by removing those blessings we haven't thanked God for. We can go on enjoying the beauty of creation, our health, our loving relationships, our lives, without being grateful to God. Why is it so important to be thankful?

An “attitude of gratitude” can certainly help us focus on the positive aspects of our lives and that can reduce the stress we feel from “the negatives,” especially those that we have no control over. This is common sense advice you can read on posters and in magazines all over the secular world. If an attitude of gratitude is good for us, then it makes sense to try to develop one. I'm not sure who or what the object of gratitude is for people who don't believe in God. It seems like the advice to “count your blessings.” You can make a list of all the good things in your life and stop there.

But for people of faith thanksgiving is more than that. It is an acknowledgement of our right relationship to God, our creator. We are God-made, not self-made, and thanking God for God's gifts to us helps us remember that. Giving thanks is a path to humility and an inoculation against self-righteousness. Good for spiritual growth and health.

Thanksgiving is also a practice that can lead to the wonderful blessing of hope, hope founded on God's goodness to us. I'm sure that every person here has been through one or a few or many times of great difficulty, what might be called "sojourns in hell," sojourns unique to each of us. Though we may be battered and bruised, we are here. God has not abandoned us. Looking back today, no matter what we've been through and what we may be going through now, we can see that God has been with us, God is with us. In fact, for many of us, our personal experiences of "hell" have given us a push toward heaven and to God, whose love for us is without limit and eternal. Our hope is in God, who is faithful.

Each week when we celebrate the Holy Eucharist we remember the Last Supper, Jesus' words and actions and prayer to God. "On the night before he died for us, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, 'Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.'"

Jesus had hours to live. He was sharing a last meal with his beloved disciples and friends. Earlier in the day, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he had prayed fervently that God would spare him. But he had offered to do God's will, and here he was, at the Last Supper. And Jesus gave thanks to God! This isn't just "saying grace" before eating food. This is so profound it ought to stop us in our tracks and bring us to our knees. Because how could Jesus have given thanks to God just before his death if he hadn't had the deepest assurance that God was good, his eternal loving Father, whose will was the healing and salvation of the world? In the words of the Eucharistic Prayer, Jesus invites us to remember him when we receive the bread, his Body. He also calls us to remember his profound faith in the goodness of God, the faith that enabled him to give thanks to God the night before he died. A faith that was affirmed in his glorious Resurrection.

Today is a day for thanksgiving – for food and for all the blessings of our lives. Gathered here together, followers of Jesus, may we also remember to be thankful for what is much more important than a delicious feast. May we remember to be thankful for the goodness and faithfulness of our loving heavenly Father, for the faith of Jesus, and for the hope we have that God's love will triumph over all. In Jesus' name. Amen.