

An Attitude of Gratitude Deuteronomy 8: 7 - 18

Newtonbrook United Church, October. 12, 2008



Today in Canada we celebrate Thanksgiving – giving THANKS.

- To whom, or to what, do we give thanks?
- Do we travel our journey through life with an attitude of gratitude?
- For what do we give thanks?

On Friday afternoon I was in this building writing a sermon for the church on Sunday morning – that’s us – the church. This is only “the church” when people are here, from my perspective. I was interrupted by the buzzer indicating that someone was at the door. I went to answer it rather than try to deal with the visitor over the intercom. That’s when my plans for this sermon, and what I had written, went south. God seems to intervene in mysterious ways.

When I opened the door, a woman was standing there with a fluffy white dog, with long hair, in her arms.

She smiled; I said hello?? Can I help you? She smiled. She said nothing. It was a bit uncomfortable for me.

Just then another woman arrived, I turned to say “Hi” to her and she indicated that the other woman was there first. I turned my attention back to the smiling woman who hadn’t yet said anything.

Can I help you? I said.

Her response was; “You baptize dog?”

It wasn’t what I had expected. In 16 years of ordered ministry, this was a first for me.

By this time a third woman had appeared at the steps where I was standing and she silently observed the discussion about baptizing dogs – or not. There’s nothing quite like facing a question for the first time and having an audience.

Let’s cut the story short - I’ll acknowledge that I did not baptize her fluffy white, cute looking little dog. The woman shrugged and left me to converse with the other two women – neither of whom was carrying a dog, or cat, or anything else.

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That's where I think that God – remember God ? – intervenes in the story. I think that, in some mysterious way, God called me to the door.

One of the women asked me if I could provide her with a food voucher for Food Basics so that she might buy food for Thanksgiving. The other woman interrupted and said that she was here at our door for the same reason. She also asked for food vouchers.

That incident at the door prompted me to consider the relativity of Thanksgiving?

One aspect of Thanksgiving is that there may be people who give thanks on a relative basis.

I suspect that many of us here today can be thankful that we have not been not at a church door asking for food for Thanksgiving. Yes, we can be thankful that we are better off than someone else. HOWEVER,

- do we want to thank God for the fact that, somehow, we are further up the ladder than someone else?
- What kind of God would establish a hierarchy for God's children so that some would be better off than others? When we say thank God I'm not at a church door, are we really saying that God is responsible for the fact that we are better off than others?
- What kind of God would bestow more love on some people than others? Is this the God the authors of the Book of Deuteronomy wrote about?

I believe that the God who loves us all calls us to a journey where we give thanks on a deeper level.

Many Canadians will be sitting down to turkey dinners this year with an unwanted and uninvited guest at their table. The guest has a name – that name is anxiety.

Across Canada, and around this inter-connected world, people are asking questions about how this current economic situation will affect them, and their families. What will happen to my retirement funds? Am I going to lose my job, or my home?

If nothing else, the current state of the economy is a clear demonstration of how inter-connected we all are with each other. WE ARE NOT ALONE!

That is a fact of life today. At the same time there is another question, or for Christians maybe it is the first question¹:

“What is a Christian response to a deepening economic crisis like this? What should people of faith be thinking, saying, doing? Where is God in all of this?”

¹ SoJo.net, “Political Strategy for an Economic Crisis”, Oct. 2008

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Against this backdrop, some would still call us to be thankful that we live in a relatively affluent society.

As our United Church **Moderator, David Giuliano** said this week², “The terrible irony is that while our attention has been focused on stock markets and financial institutions around the world crying poor, the cries of those who are truly poor are not being heard.”

“We must always remember that,” he said, “while we live in a world of great abundance, there is also incredible disparity”. For example, 750,000 Canadians rely on at least one of over 650 food banks – twice as many as in 1989; 80 per cent of First Nations peoples in Canada have personal incomes below \$30,000 per year. (\$94,000 per family in the Willowdale riding – nearly three times as much!)³

Globally, David Giuliano explained, there is a vast economic gap that divides those living in the North and South. In Canada, the gap between rich and poor is widening, too⁴.

Because the current state of the economy is demonstrating that we are all in this together, this is an opportunity for us to develop creative solutions;

- such as the possibility of working together, rather than competitively;
- why do we not give our business to local, family owned firms,
- rather than placing our hard earned money in the palms of large corporations why not do business with community-based credit unions;
- can we develop co-operative arrangements with other churches and social agencies rather than trying to do everything ourselves;
- what about purchasing our groceries from a co-op store, as many do in the Atlantic provinces? etc.
- Before you go to vote on Tuesday, know where the candidates in your area stand on the issue of the elimination of poverty, and the equitable distribution of incomes.

Remember those women at the door – and baptizing dogs? How can we be thankful in a profound way?

I'd suggest that for Christians we begin by giving THANKS to the One who gave us life – and continues to sustain us through life; the One who is with us in life, in death, and in life beyond death – as we say in our statement of faith. Without the Creator, whose Spirit breathes life into us, we are nothing.

² United Church of Canada Press Release, October 8, 2008

³ from CBC website: Riding profiles

⁴https://www.policyalternatives.ca/documents/Manitoba_Pubs/2008/FastFacts_May1_08_GrowingGap.pdf

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Mary Jo Leddy, one of the people who I consider a present-day saint, helped me to understand this aspect of thanksgiving when she wrote a story about how her life began.⁵

Her mother and father had been married here in Canada just before the Second World War. During the war they had taken their medical skills across the Atlantic to help the wounded. Her Mom was a nurse in London and her father was a medic in France, Holland and Belgium.

Toward the end of the war her father was given four days of leave. He grabbed a motorcycle and raced across the roads of Belgium and Holland to reach the port of Ostend. The ferry was blowing its horn for departure as he roared up the pier on the motorbike. This was the last ferry that day for England.

Across the Channel, he caught the train for London and it pulled into Victoria Station as church bells were ringing and the streets were full of people shouting, "*The war is over! Its over!*"

"In the midst of this pandemonium, he found my mother and they were able to spend the day together. My father left London and would not see my mother until a year after the war was over. Nine months after V.E. Day I was born."

When she reflected upon her birth, and the circumstances surrounding her conception, Mary Jo Leddy wrote;

"I was radically amazed. I realized that there was all the difference in the world between being and not being at all. I could no longer take my life for granted."

She reflects that if circumstances had been just a little bit different, someone else, not her, would have been born. That applies to all of us, does it not?

We have been given the gift of life. **May we live with an attitude of gratitude.**
THANKS BE TO GOD!

Hymn # 706 – Give Thanks For Life

⁵ This story is from "Radical Gratitude" by Mary Jo Leddy, pages 41, 42

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Prayers for God's Family and Creation – Thanksgiving, 2008

Creator of the world,
may we who have been blessed with the gift of life,
give thanks always,
sharing from the abundance that you have created.
In all the earth, may we recognize your gifts
and live with respect in this part of your universal creation.

Loving God,
presider over the affairs of persons and nations,
may we make wise decisions as we vote in a federal election this Tuesday;

Gracious God,
move us to thanksgiving,
not because of what we have, but because of whose we are;
not because of present blessing,
but because of your continuing providence;
not because of the moment,
but because of the eternity of salvation.

Spirit of Life;
Let our thanksgiving be expressed
not only in feasting, but in sharing;
not only in passive enjoyment, but in active service;
not only in annual observance, but in a daily attitude of gratitude.

And because your concern for wholesome living
embraces every person upon the earth,
we pray for ourselves and for others

We pray as followers of Jesus. Amen.

