

Thanksgiving Day
Matthew 6:25-33
Thursday, November 26, 2020

Well, like everything else this year, Thanksgiving is a wholly different experience. For those of you joining via Zoom, I hope that this finds you well, and blessings on your Thanksgiving observance. I was struck that one of the things we lose when we are virtual is smell. While the experience is certainly different online, you can at least see and hear much of what you would see and hear were you here in person. But touch and smell are different realities. They cannot be transported via fiber optics. They are bound to time and space. And for those of you who have experienced the Thanksgiving service in years past, you know the moment of this service and the space of the Historic Church envelop you in the delightful aroma of freshly baked bread. As our Jewish brothers and sisters repeat at every Passover and Yom Kippur service, "Next year in Jerusalem!" perhaps our refrain this year is, "Next year in person!" May it be so!

It is against this rather stark and sobering backdrop of COVID-19 that the usual words of the Thanksgiving service, "do not worry about your life," take on unusual resonance and import for us this year. As Patricia Lydon poignantly noted in her stewardship talk last Sunday, this year has been very difficult, particularly not being able to see children and grandchildren. Along with the myriad concerns of life--work, family, friends, health, community, those living on the margins, the political realities of this moment, and more--COVID-19 has ramped up the anxiety for all of us. What once was a reminder to gain proper perspective, "do not worry about your life," now takes on the weight of an impossible order, "DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE!" If you say so. But how?

How do we not worry? Indeed, the moment you are told not to worry, you begin to think about worrying. You graduate to worrying about not worrying, and a vicious cycle ensues. Do not worry becomes a fait accompli to do just that: Worry! Indeed, just as I am writing, I receive news that I may have been exposed to the Coronavirus. The lump in your throat creates even more worry, as you wonder if it is a symptom. And I suspect that we all have had the experience of wondering if that ache is ordinary or part of the virus. Am I having trouble breathing or is it psychosomatic? Do I really have a temperature or is it a random hot flash. Quarantining becomes vital to making sure others stay safe, and testing confirms whether or not you may actually have the virus. Both, however, are also opportunities to sit with concern, uncertainty, worry. Thus, this year is a heavy lift for giving thanks and keeping perspective.

Nevertheless, perspective may be one of the keys not only to living through this pandemic but living period. As Rabbi Harold Kushner notes in his book, *Who Needs God*: "Religion is not primarily a set of beliefs, a collection of prayers or a series of rituals. Religion is first and foremost a way of seeing. It can't change the facts about the world we live in, but it can change the way we see those facts, and that in itself can often make a difference." Thus, we certainly

have been given a particular perspective on this year and this Thanksgiving Day that we could hardly imagine before COVID-19. Last spring, we recognized instantly all the things that we take for granted--from access to grocery stores to toilet paper, from ease of movement to transportation, from work to health, and on and on--those things that were painful to realize, but hopefully also gave us a perspective about what matters and what we have. And throughout this year there have been innumerable reminders of this reality. Moments of seeing that while we endure a reality that we would never choose, we also experience life that makes us more fully and deeply aware of the blessings of this life.

Indeed, the facts about the world in which we live cannot be changed, but the way that we see those facts and live into this reality can be changed. God is not the knight in shining armor who takes us away from the difficulties. Ironically, God in Christ is the one who enters more deeply into the world, so that we might see and experience that we are not alone. God is not a cure all for the problems of life. Rather, God in Christ is a reminder to us of the spirit of God that resides within us and allows us to engage with those problems. God is not a magical potion that eradicates disease and dis-ease. Instead, God in Christ offers the perspective that regardless of where we find ourselves, we are not God forsaken but the beloved of God. Now and always.

In moments where we feel overwhelmed or afraid, it is almost impossible *not* to worry. The hope of our practice--weekly worship, daily prayer, seasonal services of Thanksgiving, occasional moments of serendipity or epiphanies--is an ongoing exercise of reminding ourselves that we are not alone, a way of seeing the world where God continues to meet us and walk with us, and a perspective that the holy is hidden all around us, waiting for us to recognize what is always already there. May we have eyes to see, ears to hear, and noses to catch a whiff of the holy passing us by.

As it is Thanksgiving and so much takes place around a table, I thought the following poem by Joy Harjo was appropriate. The poem is entitled, *Perhaps the World Ends Here*. It is clearly filled with images of the kitchen table. I also am reminded of the Eucharistic table, the communion table when I hear it. Here is Harjo's poem:

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.
The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table.
So it has been since creation, and it will go on.
We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners.
They scrape their knees under it.
It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human.
We make men at it, we make women.
At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.
Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children.

They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror.

A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse.

We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.