

The Road Less Traveled – November 23, 2018

We are in the midst of the Thanksgiving weekend, when we as a nation pause to give thanks for all the blessings in our lives. And it's probably good that we have this designated time, because it's hard sometimes to remember to stop and give thanks. Let's face it, our lives move at a thousand miles per hour, the whole world seems like a distraction and challenges lurk around every corner. Even during this season, it is difficult sometimes. We know intrinsically that we are blessed, but sometimes in the hustle and bustle of the real world, that knowledge can get lost. It should not be lost on us, however, that the first Thanksgiving – the 1621 meal that we commemorated yesterday – came not after a year of plenty, but a year of struggle and sacrifice. The successful harvest that the Pilgrims celebrated came at a high cost, and yet they felt called by God to pause and give thanks for the blessings in their lives.

Even more significant, however, is the actual holiday that we just celebrated. Though the Thanksgiving celebration rapidly became woven into fabric of our nation, it was more than two centuries after that original meal before Thanksgiving was recognized as a national holiday. The initial proclamation, which designated the holiday, noted:

“The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God ... No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

“It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.”

They are words that any preacher would be proud to preach. And yet, the real message is in the context. For the author of the proclamation was President Abraham Lincoln, who wrote those words in 1863, in the middle of the Civil War. It is interesting that in the midst of a war that was tearing this nation apart, Lincoln insisted that God's blessings be acknowledged.

Surely we must insist likewise. Let us be a people of thanksgiving.