

## Thanks Giving, Thanks Living

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight O Lord, you who are rock, redeemer & Renewer of us all. Amen. (Ps 19:14)

Grace and Peace be with you, dear Friends!

How is it with your soul? How's goes it in participating in building God's kin-dom on earth as it is in heaven?

Friday, as a faith community, we gathered around a family... we shared words of life, we shared words of hope, and we showered the family with blessings as good Methodists do – plenty of food and refreshment. It calls to mind the abundant feast we hear about from the prophet Isaiah (25:6); a 'victory banquet' of sorts... acknowledging the transition from the striving of earthly life to a new life with Christ in glory.

In true kin-dom fashion, the hands & heart of the people known as Saint James offered such a feast. As I observed the gifts of love poured out in setting up tables, dropping off food, scheduling people for serving and more, it gave me pause and reason to reflect.

We are at the end of the year...the liturgical year. We have spent the year, Advent, Christmas & Epiphany, Lent & Easter, Pentecost and the season after Pentecost, journeying through the gospel of Mark. As we turn the calendar and prepare to journey with Luke (year C), the church pauses to acknowledge the reign of Christ, the kin-dom to which we belong because of what the Lord has done FOR US.

We are also on the eve of an annual time of reflection, gathering and thanks giving. What would it look like if we shifted our perspective to thanks-living?

In the gospel lesson, this traditional Thanksgiving Day scripture is from Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount'. Even in 1<sup>st</sup> century the people were caught in the tension of thanks-Living and anxiety. Even then, just as today, we know we ought to be giving thanks, but we are anxious.

Two years ago, we were being bombarded by advertisements for all the 'things' we needed to get ready to buy on 'Black Friday', the day after Thanksgiving. I recall thinking: 'can anyone enjoy the time with family if you are worried about getting somewhere in time to get what you want?'

LAST year, it was more a matter of wondering IF stores would be open OR IF you ordered online... and the traditional gatherings were low key, limited in numbers of family present, or magically occurred by technological wonders (like zoom & face time) and online adaptations.

Jesus makes it plain: worrying is counter to life. Instead, seek first God's ways. We know the ways of God... it is Love rooted in JOY and holy habits.

Some people I've shared conversation with recently have mentioned '*the day the world stopped*'. What day was that? For many of us, it was the day we had to announce that our churches would NOT come to the building to worship due to COVID-19 pandemic (Mar 15, 2019).

What have we learned about how we spend our time, how we spend our money? We have worried a lot these past two years, haven't we? We've mourned the loss of doing things 'we used to do'. We've worried about health, safety & and the lack of things we need or want. We've started doing some things again, though with different ways or practices.

On that day, what did NOT change? What has not changed through this pandemic time?

The writer of the book of Revelation is clear about what is true and unchanging, the Triune God: 'the one who is and was and is coming, and from the seven spirits that are before God's throne, and from Jesus Christ - the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth' (Rev 1: 4b-5).

These revelations offer assurances of God's triumph in Jesus and call us to thanks-living in response to the One who is the same God who spoke to Moses in from burning bush, 'I am who I am' (Exodus 3:14).

The writer tells us at present he is the risen Lord and in the future 'he is coming with the clouds'. Jesus Christ, as revealed in earthly ministry and in scriptures, is the one who died, who rose, who reigns, and who will return.

But more than that... we have a blessing promised as we respond in faithfulness to the love already shown: Christ's self-giving love has freed us! We ARE the KIN-DOM of God, we are priests of Christ's reign, we are the mediators of God's presence in the world, and we are messengers who share what has been given to us and done for us. Remember, Jesus not only 'loved' us on the cross, he 'loves' us here and now –present tense.

Dear Friends, How shall we live in response to this? It seems that a 'thanks-living' lifestyle is in order: Thanks-Giving & Thanks-Living.

There's no question we have the opportunity to re-frame thanksgiving after these past nearly two years. I pray the opportunity to gather with those people you love brings comfort and joy. But what about after the guests leave, or you drive away?

Thanks-Living is a shift away from the 'what's next worries' to the appreciation of the present moment. Thanks-Living is noticing the falling of a yellow leaf, a breeze that stirs the trees, a shimmer of sunlight on the water, the rise of moon. Thanks-Living is expressed in three squeezes on your hand or your arm, or the wink of an eye across the table. Thanks-Living is sending a text or an email right when you think of it, rather than running off to the next thing.

Thanks-living is reflecting on what made the day savory or sweet, and giving thanks to God for both flavors of the day. Thanks-living is closing your eyes in full surrender and trust that you were loved; you are loved, and you will be loved through the night until as you rise again.

Friends, What one thing will you do differently this week because of this Word? May it be so. So be it. Amen.

**Let us JOIN TOGETHER WITH THE LITURGIST, Barbara Cook, AS SHE LEADS us in prayers for God's people, church & World ...**