

The Rev. Kimberly Reinholz
Grace and Holy Trinity Church
Tuesday November 26, 2019

Happy Thanksgiving to everyone gathered here today. Thank you for the beautiful music GRCC. Thank you to the Altar Guild, the readers, chalice bearers everyone who set up for the service and prepared the altar to the Glory of God.

Every year since I came to Richmond in 2015, it has been my honor and joy to preach at this service. It is a unique moment in our year when the academic, religious, and secular calendars fall in line, and nearly everyone takes a moment to give thanks for family, friends, fellowship, and all the good things in our lives.

But there is something strange to me about the secular holiday of Thanksgiving as we currently celebrate it. In part because of the myths that surround it, which ignore the destruction of entire cultures, the enslavement of native people, and the forced migration off of

sacred land onto reservations thousands of miles from where they began.

The native tribes and the pilgrims were not friends. They didn't sit down and celebrate the harvest together with songs and collective exhilaration. It doesn't matter if you mark the first Thanksgiving as happening in Virginia or Massachusetts after the war of 1812 or the end of the Civil War. All of our stories about The First Thanksgiving are troublesome at best.

I hope that you don't hear that statement as saying we shouldn't celebrate Thanksgiving. On the contrary, giving thanks is the bedrock of what Christians practice. In the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement, we make Thanksgiving our primary form of worship - the Word for Thanksgiving in Greek is Eucharist. It is not just a great thanksgiving but The Great Thanksgiving. I know that most of us who gather tonight consider this a valuable time to give thanks for family, friends, health, wellbeing, and the good things that surround us. We do this once a year, the fine china, polite dinner conversation, with a

side of side-eye, and comments under our breath.

We actually aren't being generous in spirit or giving thanks for the blessings of this life. When we give thanks only for the victories, for the privilege we have, only for the good which the world recognizes as good- youth, health, age, physical beauty, then we miss the bigger picture. And we, in essence, only give thanks to ourselves for the things we think are good. But what God thinks is Good, is all of creation, all of us, and all that God has made is good. Warts and All. Wars and All. Weeping and All.

God ought to be thanked for all and with all and in all. This is what the religious and spiritual observance of Thanksgiving is all about. This is a practice that transcends dogma. A practice found across culture and language and creed. Gratitude not just for the things we have or the relationships we claim to value, but this is a

practice of inclusion, of welcome, of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This is why we, as Christians, give thanks every week. This is why we make offerings to God for all the gifts that God has given us. Because of this, good, bad, in between, all this life that we live is a gift from God. And we are called to give God thanks and praise. No matter how many turkeys we eat, or if there are canned or fresh cranberries on the table on Thursday. What matters is that we come to the table.

There is a beautiful song performed by the Highwomen that has been my soundtrack for this sermon that I'd like to share with you- it is usually sung in 4 part harmony, so I beg your forgiveness in advance for only singing the melody of the chorus. The song is called "Crowded Table," and the chorus is :

I want a place with a crowded table
And place by the fire for every one
Let us take on the world while we're young and
able

And bring us back together when the day is done.

The door is always open
Your picture's on my wall
Everyone of us is broken
And everyone belongs
Yeah everyone belongs.

This is the image I want you to take with you tonight. That at the table of God, no one is perfect. No one needs to pretend that the conversations in the kitchen aren't happening. No one needs to be upset that the cornbread is crispier than it should be. No. Thanksgiving is about recognizing that none of us are perfect, that not one of us is worthy of what we have been given, nor are we worthy of what we have been denied. Worth is not measured by our portfolios, nor by the emptiness of our stomachs.

Why we come to this crowded, or maybe not so crowded, table is because we all belong here. We all need to admit that we bring with us our own shortcomings, our own sins, our own

myths about who we are, how we got here, and what we expect from ourselves, but all of our pictures are on God's wall. God gives thanks for each of us, and we are encouraged, and as Christians, we believe we are made to give thanks to the Lord Our God. We are beings created to Give Thanks to God for all the blessings of this life.

Blessings are not necessarily good things; in one of the most foundational stories in the Hebrew Scriptures, we learn about the Blessing of Israel - which includes Jacob wrestling with God's angel and coming away with a limp. Each of us needs to wrestle with what our blessings may be, and we will probably come out a little worse for the wear; that is, after all, what happens when we wrestle. When we do hard things, we get bruised, but like my lifting coach in high school used to yell when we got tired. You've got to keep going, if you don't max out you don't know what you can do, don't leave anything on the floor.

Let us put it on the floor here. Let us wrestle with it all, not just tonight, not only on

Thursday but every week and every day. Let us look around and see where the myths and the truths lie. Let us recognize it and amend it. Let us find places where reconciliation is possible. Let us find a seat at the table and have the hard conversations. Let us own who we are and where we are and what we have done and let us amend our behaviors, confess the sins not only of ourselves but of our ancestors, and not expect those whom we have trespassed against to trust us overnight.

Thanksgiving isn't an annual event for us. We invite you to consider making Thanksgiving a weekly observance, a daily spiritual practice. In recognizing that all are broken and all belong, and none have earned anything, we get a glimmer of hope about God's promise when we come together regularly to offer thanks and praise.

I thank God for the glimpse I see in all your eyes tonight. I look forward to joining at the table with you, broken as I am. I hope you will all join me at this table in a few minutes as we consume the bread and wine, which we believe have been

blessed and made into the Body of Christ. We believe that this is the sacrament of The Great Thanksgiving, which is indicated in today's gospel message, that Jesus is the Bread of Life, and those who come to the table will never go hungry. This doesn't mean that you will never feel hunger pains again after consuming a little wafer and a sip of wine, but what it means is that those who share in this meal will share with one another, so that no one will hunger, no one will thirst, no one will suffer alone, no one will be abandoned.

We aspire that everyone who eats this bread and drinks this wine will come to understand the love of God, the sacrifice of Christ, and the Compassion of the Holy Spirit. That God's will shall be done on the earth through the hands and feet and mouths of all those who consume the Bread of Life.

If you would like to receive this bread if you would like to offer thanks to God for all that you are and all that you have been and all that you will be, I invite you to come forward and participate in this Great Thanksgiving. If you do

not feel comfortable receiving communion, you can still come forward and offer thanks. I will pray over you and bless you saying: "The Lord Bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and give you peace."

I know not everyone feels comfortable at this table, I know that the church has done a lot of things that have caused a lot of pain. I know also, that God is bigger than any congregation, denomination, or religion. God finds a way to invite each of us to the table.

I want place with crowded table
And place by the fire for every one
Let us take on the world while we're young and able
And bring us back together when the day is done.

The door is always open
Your picture's on my wall
Everyone of us is broken
And everyone belongs
Yeah, everyone belongs.

I want place with crowded table
And place by the fire for every one
Let us take on the world while we're young and able
And bring us back together when the day is done.
And bring us back together when the day is done.

Amen