

## A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Thursday, November 26, 2020 – *Thanksgiving Day!*

# Famine, War, Pandemic, and Thanksgiving

*Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him. —Job 12:15*

*Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!  
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,  
Who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,  
Who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love  
and mercy,  
Who satisfies you with good as long as you live, so that your youth is  
renewed like the eagle's. —Psalm 103:1-5*

*O Give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; because his mercy endureth  
forever. —Psalm 118:1*

A blessed and joyful Thanksgiving to all! No matter how your family gathering shapes up in this odd season, may it be a day of gratitude, rest and refreshment. It is so important that we take time to give thanks.

The tradition of a day of thanksgiving goes way back. Certain gatherings of the ancient Hebrews could be considered thanksgivings. Pentecost was the feast of the first fruits and could easily qualify. On many occasions in our Western world days of thanksgiving have been declared. November 5 has long been a day of thanks in England. You may have heard it called Guy Fawkes Day which is a celebration of thanks that Mr. Fawke's plan to blow up Parliament was foiled at the last minute. Single days of thanks have been declared in the United States to celebrate war victories. Washington proclaimed November 26, 1789 as a day of thanks for the adoption of the United States Constitution. But generally, days of thanksgiving have been associated with harvest time and for many years various states would set days for such celebration. For the average American, Thanksgiving brings to mind two particular celebrations, and these feasts came at times when most of us would not have been in a thankful mood.

First, we think of the Pilgrims of the Plymouth Colony and their 1623 celebration. Rain had come after a long drought and they proclaimed a day of thanksgiving for this relief. They had held other feasts of gratitude, but this was the first officially declared one. These were the feasts which got the Thanksgiving ball rolling in America. The popular pictures and portrayals of that party warm the heart with images of healthy-looking pilgrims passing platters piled high with rich foods. I suspect that if we could

have been there, we would have been horrified to see gaunt, underfed pilgrims in worn clothes passing ample, though not overflowing plates of food. So many had died and the suffering was so great in those first years of the colony. The trauma of it all may well have left me in no mood for a Thanksgiving celebration, but in faith they gathered. They knew real hardship, but they knew that such hardship does not erase other blessings given.

Our present late November Thanksgiving Day is a tradition made official by Abraham Lincoln in 1863. These were years of unprecedented bloodshed as the Civil War raged on. There had been two years of devastating conflict and more lay ahead, but in the middle of it all was a day of thanksgiving. This declaration of a Thanksgiving Day was promoted by a woman named Sarah Hale. Long before the war she pushed for a national day of thanks believing that such an observance would unify and preserve the country. Although the war was not averted, Lincoln still embraced the idea, and so we have our present celebration. Here again, I wonder just how thankful I might have felt had I been there in 1863, and if I would have been in any mood for offering thanks. Those people knew real hardship, but they also affirmed the truth that hardship does not erase other blessings given.

Now we gather, or at least attempt to gather, for a celebration of thanks, and we may not be feeling up to the task. I could bellyache for quite a while about the heartbreaks of this difficult year, and perhaps you could do likewise. Friends have been lost, lives have been seriously disrupted, daily living just ain't what it used to be, and the end still remains a mystery. But God is good, and God's mercy endures forever! With real embarrassment I remember the countless blessings which I have received just this year. God have mercy on my ungrateful soul!

This isn't the Thanksgiving we had in mind, but it is Thanksgiving. Let us be grateful, for God is good, and his mercies endure forever! And that is a long, long time!

Gratefully,

Pastor Jim

*Glory be to thee, my God, for all the blessings of the past day, for thy presence ever with me, for the love of family and friends, for every kindness shown me by others, for the satisfaction of my work and for the knowledge that I am held safe in thy hand whatever happens. I lift my heart in love and gratitude to thee, dear Father, praising thee that thou has made me thy child through Jesus Christ. —George Appleton*