

Joel 2.21-27
Luke 12.16-21
Being Rich Toward God
SWCOB 11.22.09

A family seated themselves around the Thanksgiving table,
And admired the feast in front of them.

From the youngest to the oldest they oohed and awed.

When it came time for the blessing,
The parents asked their youngest,
A five-year-old boy, to give thanks.

He began by looking at the turkey,
And expressing his thanks to the turkey,

Saying that, though, he had not tasted it,
He knew it would be delicious.

After that, he got on a roll,
And began to give thanks and credit,
On up through the line.

He thanked his mother for cooking it,
And his father for buying it.
He thanked the grocery store clerk at the checkout line.

He thanked the people who put it on the shelf.
The farmer who raised it.
The mill that ground the feed.
The trucker who brought the feed to the farmer.

After he had traced the turkey from its origins to the table,

He stopped, he looked up and he asked,
“Did I leave anybody out?”
His older brother, by now tired of listening, answered, “God?”

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Sometimes it is hard to know where to begin,  
Or even hard to know where to stop,  
In giving thanks for the blessings we have.

Our ultimate thanks goes to God, our Maker and Provider,  
In whom all things have their origin.

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To me, it is an interesting phenomenon,
That all Americans celebrate Thanksgiving,
But not all Americans believe in God!

Atheists give thanks, but to whom do they give thanks to?

In a survey done of corporate executives
Who had a net worth of over a millions dollars,
The question was asked,

“Who or what do you credit your financial success?”

Their answers?
99% credited hard work,
97% credited intelligence and good business sense.
83% credited a higher I.Q.

63% credited being the best in every situation,
32% credited luck,

But statistically, no percentage credited God for their success.

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Our Old Testament text describes a year of bounty;  
Following years of famine.  
Once again, God has looked with favor upon the land.

Pastures becoming green,  
Trees bearing fruit,  
Abundant showers,

Threshing floors filled with grain,  
Vats overflowing with wine and oil.

God has provided bountiful blessings,  
After years of locust infestation.

~

Joel was a prophet in Judah in the years 835 BC to 796 BC.

Judah had just experienced a terrible plague of locusts,  
And Joel states that if Judah does not repent,  
This, then, will be a foretaste of God's judgment.

Joel described the locust plagues in chapter 2, verses 3b-10;

**Before them the land is like the garden of Eden,  
Behind them, a desert waste—  
Nothing escapes them.**

**They have the appearances of horses;  
They gallop along like the cavalry.**

**With the noise like that of chariots  
They leap over the mountaintops,**

**Like a crackling fire consuming stubble,  
Like a mighty army drawn up for battle.**

**At the sight of them, nations are in anguish,  
Every face turns pale.**

**They charge like warriors;  
They scale walls like soldiers,**

**They all march in line not swerving from their course.  
They do not jostle each other;  
Each marches straight ahead.**

**They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks.**

**They rush upon the city,  
They run along the wall.**

**They climb into the houses;  
Like thieves they enter through the windows.**

**Before them the earth shakes,  
The sky trembles,  
The sun and moon are darkened,  
And the stars no longer shine.**

During the plague, Joel preached,  
**Return to the Lord your God,  
For he is gracious and compassionate,  
Slow to anger and abounding in love,  
And he relents in sending calamity.**

**Who knows? He may turn and have pity,  
And leave behind a blessing . . . (Joel 2.13-14).**

~

I am in the middle of a book about the women pioneers,  
In the early settling of Kansas.

The book is entitled,  
Pioneer Women; Voices from the Kansas Frontier.

In the book, a pioneer woman described a plague of locusts.

“Although the summer had been typically hot and dry,  
The crops were growing well.

By August, the wheat and oats were mostly in the shock,  
And the lush green pastures  
Gave promise of healthy herds of cattle.

For the farmers evaluating their prospects,  
A plentiful harvest seemed assured.

“August 1, 1874,  
Is a day that will always be remembered,  
By the then inhabitants of Kansas.

[The locusts] began, toward night, dropping to earth,  
And it seemed as if we were in a big snowstorm,  
Where the air was filled with enormous-sized flakes.

Alighting to a depth of four inches or more,  
The grasshoppers covered every inch of ground,  
Every plant and shrub.

Tree limbs snapped under their weight,  
Corn stalks bent to the ground,  
Potato vines mashed flat.

Quickly and evenly, these voracious pests,  
Devoured everything in their path.

No living plant could escape.

Whole fields of wheat, corn, and vegetables disappeared;  
Trees and shrubs were completely denuded.

When they came down they struck the ground so hard,  
Is sounded like hail.”

~~

It seems to follow then,  
That after some terrible devastation,  
Or some horrible event in people’s lives,

When things get better,  
And life becomes prosperous again,  
That people turn to God in thanksgiving.

Go figure?

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Our New Testament reading is the parable of the rich fool.

The farmer, in the text, has experienced a bumper crop year.

He has so much grain,  
That he has no place to store it all.

The grain prices are up,  
And he is hedging that the price will continue to rise.

And so he decides to invest in larger grain bins.  
Not only invest in larger bins,  
But tear down the bins he presently has.

Then he says to no one in particular,  
Though God is listening very closely,

**Self, you have plenty of good things laid up,  
Take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry.**

God finally has enough and God says,

**You fool! This very night your life will demanded of you.  
Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?**

**This is how it is with anyone,  
Who stores up things for himself,  
But is not rich toward God!**

~~

There is a sense of rugged, independent thinking in America.

The attitude, “I am the one who made all this possible.”

The “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps,” kind of thinking.

It reminds me of the Jimmy Steward’s prayer,  
In the movie, “Shenandoah.”

Jimmy’s wife is dead.

She was the religious one in the family.

He's doing everything he can to raise the family.

So they gather around the table,  
And he knows now that he is the one that has to pray.

And so he prays,  
"Lord, we cleared this land,  
We plowed it, sowed it,  
And harvested it.  
We cooked the harvest.

We wouldn't be here,  
We wouldn't be eating,  
If we hadn't done it ourselves.

We worked dog-boned hard  
For every crumb and morsel.

But we thank you just the same, Lord,  
For the food we're about to eat."

~

What is missing here?

The acknowledgement of God's hand  
In the activities of humankind.

An American wrote this in Christianity Today,

"Shall I thank God at this Thanksgiving?

Why was I born at this time,  
In the history of the world?

Why was I born in a spotless delivery room,  
In an American hospital,

Instead of a steaming shelter,  
In the jungle of the Amazon, or a mud-hut in Africa?

Why did I have the privilege of going to school  
With capable instructors,

While millions around the world,  
Without a school-book,  
Sit or squat on a dirt floor?

How does it happen that my children,  
Are tucked into warm beds at night with clean sheets,

While millions of babies in the world,  
Make their beds out in the cold?

Why can I sit down to a warm meal,  
Whenever I want to and eat too much,

When millions will know all of their lives,  
The gnawing pangs of hunger?

Do I deserve to share in such wealth?

Why me and not other millions?"

~

When the early pilgrims experienced an abundant year,

Rather than hoarding their crops for the coming winter,  
Even after experiencing such a terrible winter the year before,  
A winter, in which over half of them lost their lives,

They graciously shared their harvest,  
With the local Native Americans,  
Who had helped them to farm.

~

Proverbs 22.9,

**A generous man will himself be blessed,  
For he shares his food with the poor.**

Acts 20.35 says,  
**In all this I have given you an example,  
That by such work,  
We must support the weak,**

**Remembering the words of Jesus,  
For he himself said,**

**“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”**

~

Henri Nouwen says,

“Thanksgiving, is first of all a North American feast.

The nation is affluent and has more than it needs.

The realization that what we have is a free gift,  
Can deepen our desire to share this gift,  
With others who cry out for help.

When we bless the fruits of the harvest,  
Let us realize that blessed fruits need to be shared.

Otherwise, the blessings turn into a curse.”

**This is how it will be with anyone,  
Who stores up things for himself,  
But is not rich toward God (Luke 12.21).**

~

I close with a prayer, author unknown:

“I do not thank thee, Lord,  
That I have bread while others starve;

Nor yet for work to do,  
While empty hands solicit heaven;

Nor for a body strong,  
While other bodies flatten beds of pain.

No, not for these do I give thanks;

But I am grateful, Lord,  
Because my meager loaf I may divide;

For that my hands may move to meet another’s need;

Because my doubled strength  
I may expend to steady one who faints.

Yes, for all these do I give thanks!

For hearts to share,  
Desire to bear,  
And will to live,

Flamed into one by deathless Love—

Thanks be to God for this!  
Unspeakable!  
His gift!”

For the glory of God and our neighbor’s good!

~

As the little boy said in our beginning story,  
“Did I leave out anyone?”

During this Thanksgiving,  
As we give thanks,  
Let our thanks begin and end in God.