

A Thanksgiving Conversation
Psalm 126; Matthew 6:25-33; I Thessalonians 5:13b-21
Salem United Methodist Church; November 22, 2015
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Today is the last Sunday in the church's liturgical year and we mark it by claiming Jesus as our King. This Christian observance is relatively new in the history of the Church. In 1925 Pope Pius XI instituted this observance at a time when respect for Christ and the Church was decreasing. He was hoping that this annual Sunday observance would remind us before we journey to Bethlehem that Jesus reigns, that Christ is over all, that Jesus is to be first in our lives. Then in 1970 the World Council of Churches officially adopted this observance. In this country, Christ the King Sunday usually is the Sunday that precedes our Thanksgiving holiday. These may seem like two different celebrations, but really they are not. Jesus did not come to live among us as an oppressive, unjust dictator, but as a King who came to serve all humanity with love, justice, and a lasting peace. Recognizing Jesus as King of all kings is something we can really give thanks. Today respect for Christ and the Church continues to decrease. Celebrating Jesus as King is more important than ever.

Our country was going through a very difficult time in 1846. The issue of slavery was already dividing our country. It was a growing political issue. One woman, Sarah Hale, thought that if our country could set aside one day to give thanks, this day might have a unifying effect on our nation. She worked for seventeen years writing letters to governors and presidents urging them to proclaim the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day. As the editor of Godey's Lady's magazine, Sarah used her magazine as a soap box to promote her idea of a national Thanksgiving Day. In 1860 she wrote that a Thanksgiving holiday would create a "complete moral and social reunion of the people of America." Sarah Hale believed this national holiday should focus on home, hearth, and family. She even suggested a New England menu of roast turkey at the center of the table, vegetables in cream sauce, and pumpkin pie. Then in 1863 as the Civil War was waging, President Lincoln declared the last Thursday of November to be a day of thankfulness for the bounty of the earth and for the nation to come together in peace. And we have been celebrating Thanksgiving ever since. In 1939 President Roosevelt changed the day from the last Thursday in November to the fourth Thursday. In the spirit of gratitude, we can thank Sarah Hale for her vision. Today, in 2015, we are still a country divided over many issues, but on Thursday we will gather around family tables with a turkey at the center and pumpkin pie to give thanks. Hopefully we can be united for just a moment and remember the great things God has done for us.

Remembering the great things God was an important part of worship for the ancient Hebrew people. The Psalms were their worship songs. Out of the 150 that have survived, almost one-third of them give thanks and praise to God for the great things God has done. There are psalms giving thanks for creation, forgiveness, deliverance, harvest, and for God just being a good and just God! Psalm 127 gives thanks to God for delivering them from their Babylonian captors. They sang, "God has done great things!" The concept of giving thanks to God runs throughout the Bible. In fact the words, thanks, thankful, and thanksgiving, are written more times in the Bible than the word, salvation. So why are we to be thankful? Why give thanks? The Hebrew word for "thanks" is the same word that is used for the word, "confess," *yadah*. When we give thanks we are actually confessing that we are dependent on someone for something. When we give thanks for the food, we are acknowledging that we depend on someone to provide the food for us-someone who grew it, transported it, purchased it, and cooked it. To give thanks to God is to confess that we depend on God. To give thanks is confess that God provides. To give thanks is to confess that life is better because of God. This is what Jesus was preaching in this passage from the Sermon on the Mount. Don't worry about life and all that is needed to live. Depend on God. Seek God's way, the Kingdom of God, and all will be well. God will provide. Later the Apostle Paul wrote about thankfulness as a confession of dependence on God. As one who was spreading the Good News about Jesus, he depended on God and was thankful in all circumstances. Paul lived through some dire circumstances. For his preaching about Jesus, he was hounded, thrown out of town, arrested, and beaten for his beliefs. Yet in the midst of these adversities, he continually gave thanks or confessed his dependence on God. He wrote to the Thessalonian church that it is the will of God that we give thanks in all circumstances.

Voice of Christ: So when are you going to thank me?

Pastor: Excuse me, you are interrupting *my* sermon.

Voice of Christ: So...when are you going to thank me?

Pastor: Thank you for what?

Voice of Christ: For what I have given you.

Pastor: What have you given me? Who are you?

Voice of Christ: Some call me the Messiah or Christ. Others call me Savior and Lord, or King of kings and Lord of lords. Some struggle with the title of King, but I am definitely not called, “Our Democratically Elected Leader.” I am the King of Glory. The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I am a king who rules over heaven and earth, yet humbled myself to live among my subjects so they would know of my great love for them.

Pastor: Well, hi! Welcome! You are always welcome here! But you do know you are interrupting a sermon that is about you.

Voice of Christ: Yes, I thought I’d lend you a hand.

Pastor: Great, I think.

Voice of Christ: So back to my question, when are you going to thank me?

Pastor: Well, we prayed a prayer of thanksgiving, sang songs about being thankful, and read scriptures about giving thanks.

Voice of Christ: Yes, and thank you for this, but when are *you* going to give me thanks?

Pastor: You mean me, personally? You mean, now?

Voice of Christ: Yes, you, and “now” is always a good time.

Pastor: Ok, well, I thank you for my family, for rain and sunshine, for friends and this church, for life and love, for health and having more food than I need, and for the rich colors of autumn. There. How’s that?

Voice of Christ: Is that everything?

Pastor: Well, I thank you for giving me the gifts to minister to your people, for leading me, for forgiving me, and for being there for me.

Voice of Christ: That’s better. Most people thank me for the obvious: family, food, friends, and my creation. I appreciate their awareness of these things, but what I really want from them is to recognize that I am in this with them, that they are never alone. That they do not need to worry, that they can depend on me, that they can put their whole trust in me no matter what the circumstances. That’s really what giving thanks to me is all about.

Pastor: Right, I was getting to that in my sermon when you interrupted. But, King of kings, it is really difficult to give thanks to you in all circumstances. How can we be thankful when the world is in such a terrible state? How can we be thankful for the destruction and killing that happens in war? How can we be thankful for the mass killings of terrorist attacks? How can we be thankful for the fact that people have to leave their homes and all that they know to find somewhere safe to live? How can we be thankful for abuse, violence, and crime? For the times in our lives when we feel alone and depressed? How can we give thanks when people betray us? How can we be thankful when a loved one dies? Just tell me, how can we be thankful in all these things and more?

Voice of Christ (very comforting and lovingly): My dear child, *I know* it’s not easy to live among all the pain, suffering, hate, and destruction in the world. Remember I lived in this world. My life began fleeing from infanticide. Remember Herod wanted all the babies killed because he was threatened by my Kingship? My parents had to flee to Egypt as refugees to protect my identity and my life. Remember as I began my ministry, I was despised, threatened, eventually arrested, tortured, and executed in a very painful manner? *I know* firsthand the atrocities humanity can inflict on each other out of jealousy and arrogance. This is why I am not the type of king that destroys. I am not about arrogance or hate. I am about love. In the midst of every horrible circumstance, I am present showing my infinite love for humanity. I am present with those who are starving and seeking a new home. I offer them my comfort and hope. At the same time I nudge those who have plenty to share their bounty with those who have less. I am present with those who are victims of terror and crime, as well as their loved ones. Have you witnessed the outpouring of love on the streets of Paris this past week? My spirit is being poured out on the people of Paris and they are being witnesses to the world of my great love. I can overcome evil with good, death with life. However, I am also with those that inflict terror, torture, and pain. I am with those who commit crimes. I try to change their hearts, but when they refuse to listen, all I can do is pick up the pieces and offer peace to those who are traumatized by their actions. I am present with the world leaders trying to nudge them with my law of love, rather than retaliation. They forget that I have commanded

humanity to love their enemies. I am present with all regardless of their spiritual state, calling them to myself, calling them to my ways of love, calling them to forgive as I have forgiven them. But there are those who have hearts of hate, and they will continue to thrust their hate onto the world. They will continue to reject my ways. They will never see how I am present in all circumstances working on one heart at a time.

Also, I am present with those who are alone. I offer them companionship. I am present with all who are depressed. I embrace them and guide them out of the darkness into my marvelous light. I am present with those who have been betrayed as well as the betrayer. As I forgive, so I encourage them to forgive. I am present with all those who believe I have taken their loved ones from them. They forget that their loved ones are with *me* for all eternity. They forget that I have promised them eternal life with me, too. I am present with everyone in every circumstance in the world. Can you imagine what the world would be like if I was not present working in all circumstances?

Pastor: Lord, I don't want to think about what the world would be without you. Your description of your presence with us through all circumstances puts a whole new spin on giving thanks. You are a great Savior and worthy of our thanks and praise. Thank you for being who you are in our lives, for being present with us in all things: the good times, the bad times, and the horrible times. Thank you for forgiving us when we do not listen to your directives, do our own thing, realize we are wrong, and seek your face. Thank you that your grace will even forgive the vilest of sinners. Thank you for never giving up on us, for continually calling us back into relationship with you. Thank you for your grace and love that continually remakes us into your perfect image of love. Thank you, Jesus, for being our King, the King of Glory and the King of Love. Amen.

Resources: "Christ the King Sunday," <http://www.churchyear.net/ctksunday.html>; "Thanking Sarah," by Candy Sagon, Washington Post, November 23, 2003, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*

