

"LEST WE FORGET"
PSALM 100
THANKSGIVING SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 25, 2018

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into Yahweh's presence with singing.

Know that the LORD is God.
It is God that made us, and we are God's;
we are Yahweh's people, and the sheep of Yahweh's pasture.

Enter God's gates with thanksgiving,
and God's courts with praise.
Give thanks to Yahweh, bless Yahweh's name.

For the LORD is good;
Yahweh's steadfast love endures forever,
and Yahweh's faithfulness to all generations.

What a marvelous Thanksgiving Eve service many of us experienced this week! Those 28 of you that made the trek over to Joy Lutheran Wednesday know what I mean. For the others of you who were not able to attend, let me tell you a few things about it, lest we forget to give thanks for it:

Pastor Rod Hank of Joy Lutheran Church in Parker sent out invitations to the area Protestant churches to join in on an interdenominational Thanksgiving worship. Two churches—Providence

Presbyterian and us—responded. I had never met Rev. Hank and only had met Rev. Van Deren once years ago.

They were both warm and welcoming to me. We designed the service together—well *mostly*, we designed the service—some of it we winged! Though there were a couple of rough spots, everyone was easygoing and appreciative of the joint effort. By all accounts and greetings after the service, it was a great experience for everyone who came together to worship God that night. PLUS, there was pie—LOTS of pie! You can't go wrong when there's lots of pie!

Pastor Rod from Joy Lutheran spoke about Christian unity and his hopes for more of it. Rev. David from Providence Presbyterian spoke from his heart about his imminent retirement plans and his thankfulness for all the 18 years he had spent there watching his church grow up, for he was their founding pastor. I spoke thanksgiving for the sacredness of Christian invitation and the hopefulness I feel that the youth of our three churches might get together for mission projects and social times as well.

The joint choir sang beautifully, but in my opinion, they should have sung more than just one song. We managed through Communion, though I forgot that in the Lutheran tradition, children do not partake. No matter, I got the chance to bless instead all the little ones who came through Chris' and my Eucharistic line.

We prayed as one voice, we sang as many voices, we laughed in all the easy spaces that were created, and we exchanged stories and Thanksgiving Prayer cards, hugs, and smiles. That is what I will remember the most—all the smiles; we were all so happy to worship God together. We pooled all our thanksgivings and all our hopes, and we brought them all before one altar, *one altar*, and it was glorious! Lest we forget, we are more alike than we are different. Lest we forget the night, we have one more person or two that we have met and that we can pray for. Our Thanksgiving table prayers included Frank and Millie, both members of Joy Lutheran; their table prayers may have included Chris and me, for in the card exchange, we got them, and they got us.

Demographically, the other two churches appear to have more senior-aged members than our church. Seeing all those folks in their late 70s, 80s, and some in their 90s made me remember my own grandparents. Some of you are lucky enough to still have your grandparents—and maybe your great-grandparents, too. Some of you like Chris and me, ARE grandparents and I know Ellie is our latest great-grandparent.

For me, I haven't shared a Thanksgiving meal with any of my grandparents since my last one was called home to God in 1983, right when I was away at law school. How I miss them at the holidays, for that was our very best time. I remember how my one grandmother-we

called her 'Punkin'- put on a traditional Thanksgiving feast every year. She made the best turkey gravy on the planet, I think. The rest of the dinner she had cooked by others, but the gravy, that was hers and hers alone.

A first-generation American, she learned her English from her older siblings who came to Newman Grove, Nebraska on the boat over the ocean from Haugesund, Norway. She was a quick study. She became an English teacher, and she had perfect grammar. I liked that she always had a hint of a Norwegian accent. Her favorite, favorite song of all time was, "God Bless America," and she sang it with gusto every time I asked if we could sing it together—which was a LOT.

My other grandmother crosses my mind at Thanksgiving, too. She was infirm during most of my childhood, alcoholism having taken a toll on her in ways I didn't know or understand until well into my adulthood. To us, she was just always happy and huggy! She lived in the Park Hill neighborhood of Denver just down the street from our church, and we used to go over to her house that she shared with our Grandpa. He made us *delicious* milk shakes on Sundays after church. We consumed them through antique silver spoons that doubled as straws. We slurped, and he held our attention with stories of the Wild West. He was a great storyteller! He liked to repeat his end lines, laughing and guffawing along with his listeners.

Nanna liked to have me crawl into bed with her under thick blankets and a silk comforter and watch TV. Her favorite thing to say was, "Oopsie-divey," and I can still hear her in my head saying that to me. They had a big nut bowl in the kitchen. I liked cracking nuts and listening to the two of them grouse about this and that. Their house always smelled of history, cat food, and sawdust, as our grandfather had his workshop out in the attached garage. On Sundays, his blue jeans would be covered with the stuff and my grandmother would get mad at him for tracking it all through the house.

I'm so thankful to have these memories. I don't remember my other grandfather very much—we called him 'Pa' and he was always dressed in a suit and tie when he came to our house. My older cousin and I would both sit on his lap at the same time—he seemed very tall to us. Cousin Leslie would get angry because he called me Sugar No. 1 and her Sugar No. 2. She would protest that since she was older, she should be No. 1. But I was No. 1, and that was just that. He died when I was 7.

Lest we forget. Jesus sat with his disciples for their last supper and he gave thanks for them and for their simple meal and for their adventures together over the three short and impossibly long years of his ministry. He gave them what we know and practice as the

sacrament of Communion, lest they forget what he had brought to their lives and what they had all meant to each other.

He gave them a charge not to be afraid, not to secret themselves away somewhere, but instead to go out and make disciples of everyone they could so that the Word would live on, so that people everywhere could experience Holy Spirit love and purpose as they had. Jesus gave them a great commission and thank goodness for us, they took it to heart. They didn't sit idly by in their upper room; filled with God's Holy Spirit, they went out, they traveled across town, they greeted people they didn't know and shared with them the Good News of Christ's love and peace.

I wonder if years later after Jesus was gone, the disciples sat around together and told stories of their adventures with him, of their meals together, their close calls, and their feeling of being family with him. I like to think so anyway.

When we give thanks today, we must also heed the call to discipleship, lest we forget that church is not the same as a social club, that Gospel is not the same as newspaper news, and that life has more meaning than just days and holidays marked off on the calendar. When Jesus sent his disciples out into the world, he did not send them out as Jews or Methodists or Presbyterians, as Catholics or Congregationalists. He didn't even send them out as Christians—he

just sent them out. Generations did all the sorting over the centuries, the othering, the claiming and the rejecting. They, and now we, did and do all the walling off. They did, and we still do all the damage to the Word by claiming it each for our own purposes.

Along the way we forgot that we all came from the same communion table, that once we were a rag-tag family put together not by pedigree but by heart, charged not with keeping the orthodoxy but with spreading the love. It was never supposed to be us vs. them. The church was never supposed to grow rich whilst peasants huddled up to the church doors outside at night just to try and stay warm.

We were sent by Christ to serve others, but the church has not exactly heeded that call. The church has left needy others to fend for themselves while protecting and building the institution. Lest we forget, that was *not* the point of the Great Commission.

We practice our religion in separate worship houses. Some of our theology varies, some of our liturgical practices are different, our hymnals are variant, and our social constructs are different in some respects. I love some of the Lutheran ways of engaging the sacred. I found my way back to church because of the welcoming spirit of the Presbyterians I met there. Personally, though not the biggest or most well-known, I think the UCC has a lot to offer other denominations in terms of social justice and missional heart.

But lest we forget, we all are children of the Still-Speaking God.

Lest we forget, Christians are all disciples of Jesus.

Lest we forget, all of us are blessed by the light of God's Holy Spirit.

Whether we use bread or wafers, wine or juice, whether we include children at the Communion table or have them wait until they confirm their faith, whether we sing out of the Lutheran Hymnal or a Presbyterian Hymn book or the New Christian Century UCC Hymnal, we have many of the same prayers, sing many of the same tunes, and shed many of the same tears of gratitude that we are known by God, that we are loved by Christ, and that we are sent in the name of the Holy Ghost.

Just as we remember our ancestors-- our teachers-- and just as we are making memories now with our offspring and their descendants, it is important that we recognize what our pure tradition of Christian faith is and what it is not, where we have honored Christ and where we have dishonored him with our competitions and divisions.

I think I'm going to go get a milkshake today and as I drink it, I will try to remember some of my grandfather's stories of the old west. I think I'm going to let my grandmother's rendition of "God Bless America" ring in my head. I think I will call my grandchildren today and somewhere in the conversation, throw in the phrase, "Oopsie divey," and see if they giggle as did I at their age.

And lest I forget, I'm going to replay in my mind the Thanksgiving Eve service this year where members of three different churches became one just for an hour or two, where voices blended from three choirs to make one, where three ministers spoke from their collective hearts instead of from their denominational heads, and when Jesus' call was temporarily realized "they they all might be one".

I hope that we can do it all over again soon and that even more people will come to a joint service next time. I hope that our kids might in the meantime be able to work together on a community mission project. I hope that our sister churches will become fully open and affirming sooner than later due perhaps in part, to their following our lead. And I think God has a reason to smile at our oneness for this one brief moment.

At the close of my piece of the triologue sermon Wednesday night, I read a quote from Helen Keller. It goes like this. She wrote: "*I do not seek the peace that passes all understanding. I seek the understanding that creates peace.*" Her wisdom has stuck with me since I found it last week. Every time we hear or read the Gospel, we are seeking understanding. Every time we step out of our comfort zone and reach out in love to others, we create peace.

This Thanksgiving weekend let us pledge to use our unique understanding of the Gospel and its history to create peace, not

division. And let us use peace as the way to pave the road to understanding what it is that *God* is calling us to do in this broken world,

Lest we Forget.

May It Be So.