

I love the Thanksgiving holiday. It has such a simple focus: a day set aside simply for giving thanks. Somehow, it has escaped most of the commercialism that has taken over other holidays, and it remains a time just to be with family and friends, enjoy a good meal - and give thanks.

If you were to make a list of the things you're thankful for, what would be on the list? My list would be something like this: I'm thankful-

- For a loving family: -- a wonderful husband, two great kids, my mother, my brothers, - sisters-in law, brothers-in-law, nieces and nephews.
- For a loving **church** family - who nurture and support me -and each other, -and, who strengthen my faith.
- For a great meal --that I'm about to eat in two hours, ---- thanks to Carol Byerley - and all of you who helped cook and provide things.
- And then, ---- for another great meal I get to eat on Thursday -with family and friends.
- For the nation I live in -that is safe and secure, and grants me so many benefits and freedoms.
- For a comfortably-furnished home -that provides me with shelter and safety and a place of well-being.

- For good health, and all that my health allows me to do.
- For the beauty of the place we live in - the beauty and majesty of the mountains and the surrounding desert.

And I could go on and on.

It's good to give thanks, --to pause in our busyness and give thanks for all our blessings.

But I have to admit something. Doing an exercise like this -- listing all the specific things I'm thankful for, -- makes me feel a bit uncomfortable, - a bit uneasy.

For as soon as I pause to give thanks for my loving family, I remember people I know -who have just lost a loved one, or have gone through a terrible family tragedy.

And as soon as I stop to give thanks for all this food I'm about to eat, I think of people who don't have any food.

-----Of the hungry -all over the world, who don't know where their next meal is coming from, -- or even if they'll have a next meal.

-----Or of the folks who come to our church office for assistance --- and are incredibly grateful -for even the small bag of groceries we give out.

----- Or, when I pause to give thanks for my health, I

remember my close friend who is seriously ill and not expected to live.

There's no way I can get around the fact that my own thankfulness -my own list of blessings -- carries with it this kind of undertone; --- this underlying awareness of the difficulties going on in other peoples' lives.

Which leads me to share an even deeper concern -- that makes me feel really uneasy. Could I possibly even be secretly thankful -that my life is not as bad as others around me; --that I'm somehow measuring my 'blessings' against others, ---and that this almost subconscious comparison is one of the things - that actually leads to my being thankful?

--That I might be indirectly thinking ---- though I wouldn't want to admit it: ---- "I thank you God, that I am *not* like my neighbor who is estranged from her family;-- -- that I've got a good family who all love each other."

or - "I thank you God, that I am *not* like my friend who just got laid off from her job, or like my other friend who is struggling to make his house payment."

Dare I even ask myself how much of my thankfulness might come from comparing what I have - to what others don't have?

Now I'm not saying we shouldn't be thankful and grateful for what we have, but I wonder if there isn't a 'way' of being thankful -that doesn't measure our blessings against others, - and, that somehow cares about what's going on in other people's lives?

A few wks ago I came across something written by retired Lutheran pastor Hubert Beck, -that helped me sort this out.

He says that the problem with the way we tend to celebrate Thanksgiving is that we use the wrong preposition. -We focus on the things we're thankful for. -But being thankful for specific blessings, --- makes our thankfulness relative to the 'gift' itself, -whether it's the gift we -or others - have - or don't have.

He says the preposition we should be using is to. We're not thankful for; we're thankful to. And the one we're thankful to - is God. Our thanksgiving is directed to the Giver, who is the source of all there is.

Thanksgiving is not about the things we have; -- it's about our relationship to the Giver.

Which leads us straight into our scripture text for today - where Jesus makes it very clear that God is the source of

all that we have, - the One to whom we look, --and the One to whom we ultimately depend on -for everything.

“Do not be anxious about your life,” Jesus says, “about what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. And are you not of more value than they? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, will God not much more clothe you?”

This passage is about where we put our focus and our trust. Do we focus on things, ---which may be transitory, -or, - do we focus on God?

Jesus reminds us that our trust and hope is in God ---in whom we live and move and have our being; -who is the source of life itself.

“Look at the birds of the air,” Jesus says. “Consider the lilies of the field.” God cares for them. God clothes them with beauty. So, think how much more

God cares for you! Our life is secure with God. We came from God. We belong to God. -And God will hold us and carry us until the day we return to God.

Thanksgiving ---being thankful --is not ultimately about what we have -or don't have; ---it's about 'who has us.'

--This lesson was really brought home to me this week, with what happened to me on Thursday, ---although I would have been fine with a more subtle reminder.

(Some of you have heard) that I was carjacked on Thursday, and the thief drove off in my car - which had everything in it: my purse, my wallet, my phone, my work, my favorite coffee mug. And no, -to answer your question, nothing has yet been recovered. And no, I wasn't harmed in any way, -- just a bit dazed by the bizarreness of it all.

And yet, in spite of my pretty significant loss of “things” and the hardship of having to replace so much stuff, I am truly thankful. Thankful to God. For it doesn't really matter what I have or don't have in terms of things. What matters is that God has me.

On Friday, I was sitting on the sofa at home, thinking about the ordeal I had gone through the day before, and while I was sitting there, my cat came over -to sit on my lap and seek some attention. Now I don't want you to think I'm psycho, but I started telling my cat about what had happened, and about all the things that had been stolen. And the cat listened politely for a few minutes --as long as I kept petting her -- and then, after a moment, she walked away, stretched and yawned and curled up to go to sleep--- totally non-plussed about what I'd been through or the things I'd lost.

And I thought, 'oh, to be a cat'. And then I thought, hmm, maybe that's the point. Oh, to be a cat, or to be the birds of the air, or to be the lilies of the field. And not to be worried about "things" at all. But to totally trust in the goodness of God, - and the care of God.

So as wonderful as things are, cars, houses, clothing, food, -- even things like health and family and church, they are not what really matters; they are not in themselves what we are thankful for. We are thankful -not for the gifts, but for the Giver. Which means -we --and others - can still be thankful even in the midst of hardship and difficulties.

In the Jewish Passover Seder meal liturgy, there's a delightfully upbeat song that's sung - called the Dayenu.

The Hebrew word, Dayenu, means "it would have been enough;" or "it would have sufficed." The song is about being grateful to God, and each of the 15 stanzas lifts up a particular saving action of God, ---- but after each stanza, comes the chorus: Dayenu, Dayenu. "It would have been enough." Even if God had only done the one thing, the song is saying, --- it would have been enough.

If God has fed us manna in the wilderness, but not brought us to Mount Sinai, Dayenu - it would have been enough.

If God had brought us to Mount Sinai, but not given us the law, Daneyu - it would have been enough.

If God had given us the law, but not brought us into the land of Israel, Daneyu -it would have been enough.

And on it goes. -The point being - that even though God had given the people many gifts, --- even if God had only done one thing, it would have been enough. For the thanksgiving is for God, not the gifts themselves.

But one question from the beginning does remain. What do we do about the dilemma ---that compared to others -

we often have so much -when there are others who have so little: food, shelter, income, health, friends, family?

Well,-- since God truly cares for every living thing --- from flowers to birds - to every single person on earth --- it seems to me that God wants every single person on earth to receive the necessities of life -and to know they are loved and cared for.

Which means, whatever we receive, we are, in turn, to give. -To follow God in God's giving nature. -To give and share,-- freely and generously, --our time, our love, and our possessions. -That not one person should go without or be left out.

God has given us an amazing opportunity to 'make a difference.' -To make a difference in the lives of others, and in the world. May we honor God with thankful hearts, with generous spirits, and with our commitment of time and resources.