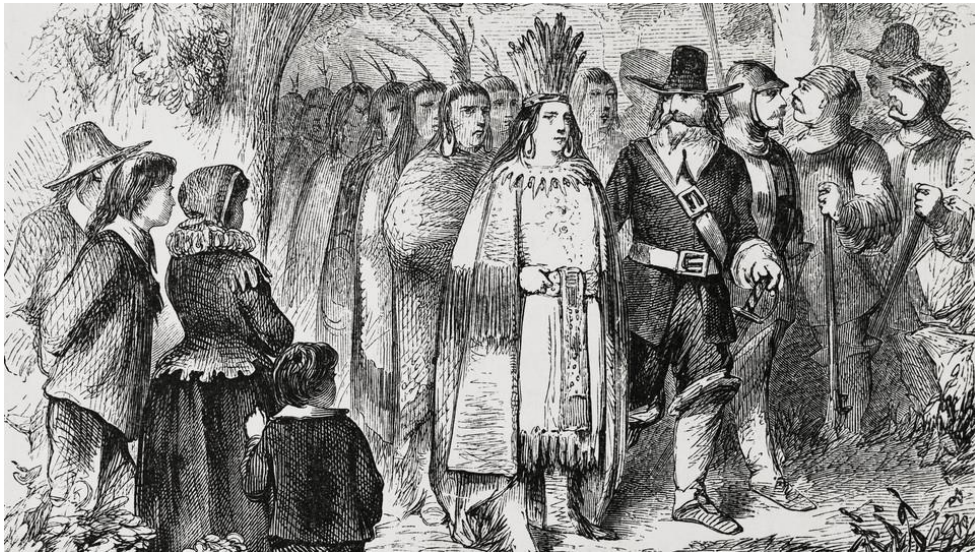




SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. CANON JENNIFER KING DAUGHERTY, CANON FOR ENGAGEMENT & CONNECTION
THANKSGIVING DAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2022
DEUTERONOMY 26:1-11; PSALM 100; PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9; JOHN 6:25-35

THANKSGIVING HOMILY



Happy Thanksgiving!

The gospel from John today takes place in the middle of Jesus' travels in Galilee as crowds follow Jesus, seeking healing and listening to him teach. They have just experienced that amazing meal where Jesus feeds 5000 people by breaking and blessing a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish.

The crowd wants to know how he fed all of them, but Jesus essentially replies, "Don't focus on what satisfies your appetite, but on what will address your deeper hunger. I am showing you signs that God is here and now! You are living in the infinite presence of a loving God. Only God can satisfy your true hunger and thirst. Entrust yourself to me and I will show you the way."

This passage is the beginning of the institution of the Eucharist in John's gospel. Rather than a story of the last supper, John grounds the Eucharist in the fullness of Jesus' life. His teaching, healing, feeding, death and resurrection too, is the food that gives new and fulsome life to the world.¹

So it's right to begin Thanksgiving Day with a Eucharist, not only because Eucharist literally means "thanksgiving" or "gratitude," but because it reminds us that the roots of this secular holiday are religious.

Thanksgiving is a complex holiday. The traditional story of the first Thanksgiving, of course, is a colonial story, and it focuses on an autumn harvest feast in 1621 shared by English colonists and members of several native tribes, including the Wampanoag, Pawtuxet and Abenaki people.

The colonists had endured a difficult first year, losing half of their party to illness. They survived, though, due to the care of Indigenous people who taught them how

to grow corn, tap maple sap, and catch fish in local rivers.

In this colonial story, when the Pilgrims' first harvest was successful, they organized a three-day feast for themselves and their native American friends. A record from that time expresses a profound gratitude that "although it will not always be this plentiful, by the goodness of God, we are far from want."² Whether they named it or not, God's life-giving goodness flowed from the abundance of Creation and the generosity of indigenous people.

When I recall this colonial story, I'm struck by two things. First -- the way grief and gratitude are bound together. The depth of the colonists' gratitude arises from the depths of their grief and fear of the previous year. Second, the vision of mutual joy and interdependence expressed in the feast. A glimmer of potential for a holy relationship.

¹ *New Interpreters' Study Bible*, p. 1920.

² <https://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving/history-of-thanksgiving>

But when we tell this simple story of the first Thanksgiving, we must name what followed.

Theft of indigenous land, removal and destruction of native communities, cultural and physical trauma heaped on children in the federal Indian boarding school system, and continued inequity in education, healthcare, and housing, just to name a portion.

It is a history whose unhealed wounds are still being revealed and it calls us to repentance and reparation for the deep harms of colonization. This is essential spiritual, material, and civic work that we take up, with God's help. Our celebration of Thanksgiving is bound up with this commitment. It's complex.

It's significant that Thanksgiving became a national holiday in 1863, in the midst of the Civil War. President Lincoln encouraged all Americans to give thanks for God's abundant blessings,

approaching God with "humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience" and

"commending to God all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in this lamentable civil strife." The gratitude of that day was also bound up with grief and remorse.

For much of American culture, Thanksgiving is a day of counting blessings and feasting. For some, it will be a pleasant gathering with family and friends. For others, it will be a quiet day to observe the holiday alone. I want to honor the reality that for some people – including some here -- this day is tinged with sadness and loneliness. So let's set aside the advertising myths of the day and acknowledge that to be truly grateful means to also own our grief, wounds, and regret.

True gratitude is a complex thing. We give thanks for good fortune and loving relationships. But what is the substance of gratitude in the face of mass shootings or war? I think it is the strong and resilient gratitude that remains in the hardest of times. Gratitude to God for life, for each breath we take. Whether we feast this day or not, we give thanks that our deepest

hunger is known to God and that God's love abides forever.

In one of his daily reflections this week, Richard Rohr quotes the Lakota author Doug Good Feather on Indigenous wisdom. Good Feather writes, "Why is gratitude such a core concept of joy, contentment, and well-being in our life? The ancestors tell us there are two primary reasons. The first is that a person cannot exist in a place of fear and true gratitude at the same time. The second is that

gratitude is the doorway to divine intuition, which allows us to be guided by our connection with the Creator."

So this day, may you know and share the fullness and complexity of your gratitude. Name your joys, name your grief, name your hopes for healing in our world. Entrust them to the one who is the bread of life, who brings new beginnings out of dead endings. And rejoice that we are alive, in this together. Amen.

John 6:25-35 *[When the crowd found Jesus on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."]*