



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THANKSGIVING DAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2023
DEUTERONOMY 8:7-18; PSALM 65; 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15; LUKE 17:11-19

GIVING THANKS AS A HABIT

***Luke 17:11-19** [On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."]*

Happy Thanksgiving!

I want to talk a little bit this morning about habits.

Habits sometimes get a bad rap: it can be hard to break bad habits, it can be really hard to form new, good ones. But habits are really useful to being human. Generally speaking, a habit is a learned behavior that's been repeated so often it becomes, essentially, involuntary. Habits make our thinking and doing and being in

the world kinda efficient ... without many of our established habits of thought and behavior, imagine waking up every day and seeing the world the way you did when you were little: all those unanswered questions, all that curiosity, all the energy you'd need to get through a day! Our habits show we've come to trust certain things about the world, we've gotten used to doing things in certain ways with predictable outcomes; habits let us stop thinking through every thing we do, so we

can save brain and body energy, use it for other things..

Habits are also born from stories, stories we either tell ourselves or stories we're told by the culture that shapes us. Stories about life, or about our relationships to one another and the world around us, stories that make some things important and others irrelevant, stories that make some people important and keep others at a distance, or excluded. Stories about identity, or belonging, or purpose, all are bound up in our life habits.

Stories and habits come into being together, the one supporting the other. And, over time, as our thinkings and doings become habits, sometimes the stories they're bound to get forgotten.

Here, we open the Scriptures to remember our primary story.

The long story told by our sacred texts tells of our human relationship with God, the mistakes we make, the ways in which we harm, the pain caused by our forgetting God and disregarding one another, *and* the ways we're called back to

God, again and again, back into relationship, back into wholeness, to be healed. It's a story we have to be constantly reminded of because it's all too easy to forget it, especially when things are going well and our dependence on God is less obvious. We might exalt ourselves, tell a story of individualism, of our own hard work and self-sufficiency, and of our entitlement, whether to possessions, the earth's resources, or to the land we stand on; this is a story that erases the truth of God.

And a story without the truth of God can easily lead to ways of being and doing in the world, and so to habits, destructive and dangerous habits of life and society that just don't acknowledge that all that we are and all that we have, all that there is, is, fundamentally, of God.

Our habits, our outward and observable behaviors are only ever part of the story. Our habits and behaviors are important, for sure, but so are the stories to which they're bound, and these stories are often hidden. Beneath many a so-called "bad habit" is a hidden story of dogged survival,

a story of coping in the face of pain, a response to having been harmed. Likewise, seemingly “good habits” can sit atop hidden stories of pride, or self-centered-ness, or on ideas or values that are ultimately destructive.

Think, for example, of the Pharisee spoken of in Luke’s gospel – he’s come to the Temple to pray, he fasts twice a week and gives a tenth of his income. On the surface all looks good, he’s doing everything right. And yet the prayer on his lips when he comes before God is a prayer of Thanksgiving ... that he’s not like these other people! His pride and self-satisfaction are the story of his Thanksgiving, his “good habit” obscuring an absence of love of neighbor.

Giving thanks, (as we are doing a double dose of today!) *is* a powerful and healthy habit, *and* it’s important to illuminate the story from which our Thanksgiving flows if our habits are to truly reflect our commitment to love God with all our mind, heart, and soul, and our neighbor as ourself.

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And so we revisit our stories. Each week when we gather here, we tell and re-tell the story of our relationship with God, broken and restored, that this story might help us build habits, centered on the Truth in God, that bring us into fuller life, that set us free from those habits and stories of body and mind that limit and damage us and the world around us, and separate us from God and from one another. We gather and we give thanks. And our habits of worship bring us before God, to open our hearts, and offer us healing, and keep us in a state of ongoing transformation in Christ.

Likewise, our habit as community has us incorporate our Land Acknowledgement into every gathering, as one way of ensuring the First People of this land are affirmed as a very real part of our collective history, present moment, and future. Saint Mark’s Statement of Lament and Commitment to Action calls this community to continue to revisit the dangerous and damaging stories that have

historically been told, and seek ways to tell our shared stories anew, in light of the truths and experiences shared by those who have been harmed.

The story so long told as part of this day, is now told anew. The impulse to give thanks remains, we celebrate together, we feast together, *and* we affirm the historic harm bound up with the enduring myth that is the origin story of Thanksgiving: the devastating impact of settler-colonialism, of land theft, and the erasure of peoples and cultures and languages.

We commit to telling a new story, a true story, born of our Christian hope for habits that restore relationships and draw us *all* into fullness of life.

Giving thanks is the habit bound to the story of seeing God in all of life, as the source of all life, it's the habit bound to the love story we tell, love for our God and our neighbor, it's the habit born from the truth of the foundational story of all that we are. When this is the story that shapes our life, the story that in God we live and move and have our being, then thanksgiving is our response, and giving thanks to God is our impulse and is our habit.



Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!