

Thanksgiving

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[0 : 00] do? This is the big question. I find it almost hard because supposing there isn't enough, we will assume that it's our fault. Supposing there is enough and more than enough, we again must assume that it's our fault. And how do we turn to God in the midst of this and give thanks to him that we are called to live in this good land and amidst all the bounty that is provided for us in it? It becomes a very profound kind of problem that we should maintain touch and maintain a deep sense of personal and national thanksgiving for the bounty among which we have been called to live our lives. And it doesn't seem to me a strange thing that on this national thanksgiving we should consider the plight of the boat people. I remember when I was a university student which was many years ago, the Scotsman, which was a kind of Scots version of the London Times, the London Times didn't mean that much to them so they published their own paper called the Scotsman. And there was a leading editorial talking about the vast wasteland of Canada and how that it was necessary in order to usefully employ all that land that there should be a massive immigration policy. And though Scotland had done her best by trying to supply a sufficient population for this land, they obviously couldn't do what was required. And in that editorial in the Scotsman of all things, almost 30 years ago, they advocated that the way ahead for Canada was vast immigration from the east. And so that just bemuses me somewhat to see that that has come to pass in a way which the writer of that editorial might never have guessed. And that the vastness of our resources as a country demands a population and our place in the world demands this kind of population. And we have become intimately and personally involved in it. And that's why I suspect we need all in some measure to take an interest in the whole problem of migration from the east.

This raises, of course, another problem. And that is that our migration policy when I was young had to do largely with trying to make sure that we got as many Protestants as we got Catholics for fear that the balance of the country might be overthrown. And since the war and since I suppose the revolution that no longer seems to concern people, now the question is not a question of religion but a question of race.

And how do we want the racial balance in this country to be maintained? And so we have to ask deep and searching questions on this day of national thanksgiving to understand our place in the global community of our world and the special responsibilities that we're called upon to face. So thanksgiving has to find not only an expression of deep thankfulness to God for the circumstances in which we have been put to live our lives, but the responsibilities that we've been given to maintain the kingdom of God in our midst. And so I want just to take briefly this story. I must confess to you that I'm under pressure these mornings because it's long been the habit of St. John's that the service should be over in an hour, which means that we have four minutes to finish. And I'm working on it, but I'm not there yet.

And I need you to be patient and loving and supportive and help me figure out how you do it. I still haven't figured out how you do it, but I'm working on it.

This is the point of that lesson. First, there is a mother, a mother whom I think would fit in with that company, that noble company of people called the Shaughnessy Mothers, because this mother was very ambitious for her son.

[4 : 40] And that's a deep and mysterious kind of ambition, and perhaps very worldly as it is illustrated to be here. And she approaches Jesus and says, Can my two sons sit the one on your left hand and the other on your right hand when you come in your kingdom?

I really think we have to look at the kind of ambition that we trust on our children, the kind of hope we have for them and the kind of expectations we lay on them.

Well, this seems to me to be a good example of that, particularly as it comes after considerable teaching upon the fact that the kingdom doesn't work that way.

We just had in this chapter the parable of the rich landowner who went and hired men in the morning and at nine o'clock and at noon and at three and at five and paid them all the same to their great indignation, because he felt that he had the right to do what he believed to be just.

But we did also have the story of the disciples going to Jesus and saying, If this rich man can't get into the kingdom of heaven, who can?

[5 : 58] And Jesus says, You have to give up so much to be part of the kingdom. And he promises the disciples that they will rule Israel, that they will sit on the twelve thrones and rule Israel and judge Israel.

And so no doubt an attentive mother heard this and saw that there were going to be twelve thrones and desired that the best of them should be saved for her son. And though Jesus has just warned them that he has to go to Jerusalem and to face persecution and to face scourging and death.

Nevertheless, she comes and says, The place on your right hand and the place on your left hand I desire for my son. And Jesus says, Are you able to drink the cup that I drink on?

And they say, Yes. And Jesus says, You will. The cup of affliction which I drink, you will drink to the dregs as well. And he gives that promise to the worldly ambitions of his two disciples, James and John.

But then he goes on to tell them that the pattern that they're thinking about in terms of the kingdom is not the pattern of the kingdom.

[7 : 14] He said, That's the way that Gentiles work. Their rulers and their great men lord it over those who are under them. There is a kind of scramble for room at the top.

And of course, the whole structure of our society is very much geared to the room at the top. That's where the places of preferment are.

That's where the wealth is. That's where the ego satisfaction is. That's where the personal fulfillment is. Drive for the top as hard as you can go. And that comes to us, as in this case, with our mother's milk.

That you have to get to the top. And our education is geared to that. And the whole program of our place in society is geared to finding room at the top.

The whole labor movement is inspired by finding room at the top. And the hard, raw, rough edge of that reality is the thing that all of us confront day after day in this highly competitive, free enterprise society.

[8 : 28] That there is room at the top and we are geared in every way possible to get there. And I don't say that that's good or bad. I think it's what our world is about.

And most of you feel that. So far as you are involved in any kind of commerce or industry or political or social or service structure.

That kind of drive for the top is there. And I don't think that Jesus attempts to deny that it's there. And I don't think he even attempts to change it.

He says, that's it. And that's the way that Gentiles work. And by the Gentiles, I think he just means the world outside of faith.

But then he says, it shall not be so among you. And he gives them the two pictures. He who would be chief among you, let him be your servant.

[9 : 26] He who would be first among you, let him be your slave. And so that what he says, and I think that this is what's important for us.

I am not trying by this sermon to castigate the free enterprise or competitive system. But I am trying to emphasize that our existence as a congregation of the disciples of Jesus Christ depends upon our recognizing that our fulfillment is to be found as slaves and servants.

Not as lords and masters. And the spiritual fulfillment for your life and mine comes out of the fact of our being called to serve one another.

And to so organize our life that we can do that. That's the thing that we have to face. That's the reality that Christ points his disciples to.

He said, you've got worldly ambitions. Are you able to drink the cup? Because it can be a very bitter cup arriving at the top.

[10 : 43] And they say, yes, we can. And Jesus says, and you will. But then he says, there is another whole pattern of relationship which belongs to you.

And this is that you are to be servants to one another and slaves to one another. In the other gospel of John, he illustrates this by taking and girding himself with an apron and washing their feet.

To show what he means by this. And so that if you take not necessarily the worldly structure that you live in every day.

But what has come to be known as the world of significant others in your life. The people who are close to you. The people that are near to you.

The people that you relate to every day. Your family and your friends and your personal associates and your neighbors. In this intimate and personal relationship to significant other people in your life.

[11 : 50] Your position is to be that of a servant and of a slave. The structure is entirely different.

And we have to seek in this way to work this out in our life together as a congregation. And Jesus points out what his role is in the midst of this.

When he says that the conclusion of this. The son of man came not to be ministered to. But to minister or serve and give his life a ransom for many.

And so he sets himself in the midst of his disciples. As the one who is chief among them. And first among them. And his business because he is chief among them.

He is to be there. Their servant because he is first among them. He is to give his life. To lay down his life a ransom for many.

[13 : 04] And that's the picture of the Christian community. And that's how we are to begin to relate to the people in our lives. It's not the world we live in.

The world we live in is a different structure. The profound reality for us as Christians in that world. Is that we have to begin to work out the reality of being the servants and slaves of one another. I am very thankful on this national thanksgiving.

Because I think in our vestry meeting on Tuesday night last. We got a glimpse of that. We got a glimpse of that. And I think in our life together as a parish.

We need to come to terms with this kind of reality. We're not to bring the competitiveness of the world into the life of the church.

[14 : 05] We are to be as disciples. Anxious to serve one another. Anxious to be slaves to one another. And we're to gather around him who said.

I came not to be ministered unto but to minister. And that's terribly significant you know. Because it means that probably primary for you and me.

Is not what we can do for Christ. But something he has to do for us. And most of us are geared to think of the church in terms of something we have to do.

But in this primary relationship. What we most lack is something that needs to be done for us. By him who came to be minister. To minister to us and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And the beginnings of our understanding of the reality of that. Is when we receive what Jesus Christ has done for us. In giving himself for us.

[15 : 13] And we are enabled by his grace. To receive that which he has done for us. And then in fact our thanksgiving will know no bounds.

And will not be subject to any external circumstance. Because it will be a profound awareness. Of the constant indebtedness we are in.

To the one who came not to be ministered unto. But to minister. And to give his life. A ransom for many. We sing hymn number 305.

And you are elo. And Godtribution. The■ And you are fasting.

Amen. Amen.

[17 : 00] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.