

Friendship United Church, Demorestville, Ontario
1 Timothy 2: 1-7
October 11, 2009 Thanksgiving Sunday
Rev. Robin Sherman

Come, You Thankful People, Come!

A song of Thanksgiving. A time of giving thanks to God for all that is good in our lives. A time to gather with family and friends and eat our fill, plus a little more.

All across the country people will be cooking turkeys or hams, squash and potatoes, pumpkin and apple pies. There will be dressing and gravy, pickles and rolls. The best china and good serving dishes will be carefully placed on the table and in some homes the table may be expanded to include more than one. The children's table may be placed strategically to the main dinner table.

When I look back I can remember going to my grandmother's house for Thanksgiving and sitting under the big table before the meal, popping up every once in a while to take a sugar cube from the sugar bowl, then returning to the safety of being concealed by the tablecloth to eat the sugar.

Then we would all be seated and Grandpa would say grace...

Thank you Lord for this food, bless it to our use and us to thy service. Amen. They it would start, the passing of dishes, the clamour of forks and knives...can you picture it? Can you smell it?

These are great memories and for me certainly something to be grateful for, it is my hope that this was your experience as well; that your memories are full of wonderful gatherings and smells. I am aware that for some these memories may not be as warm and fun and we can't assume that these holidays and special occasions hold happy memories for everyone. But I am not wanting to dwell on these memories right now, I only wanted to share with you my recollection; because since I have lived in the west there is something different about Thanksgiving and since this part of Ontario involves a lot of farming it may be this way for you as well.

I have learned there is another part to Thanksgiving – Harvest. Now this may seem like a profound grasp of the obvious and indeed it is however, it wasn't until I lived in the west and witnessed harvest as it is done out there that I had to admit to myself that I had not fully understood the whole Thanksgiving harvest connection. Now to some of you this might seem odd because it has always been your way but I was a town girl and although our area was considered a farming area my family was not directly attached to a farm and so harvest was not of the same interest to me as a younger person.

In Saskatchewan, the harvest is ALL that matters. It is indeed the climatic event of the year. It is the moment everyone has been waiting for and it brings with it a heightened sense of awareness about food production and all that is riding on it. Every ounce of

energy, from all members of the family and farming community, and every business, take part in some way in the harvest. The clouds of dust rise up in the fields all along the horizon; piles of grain and rolls of hay line the fields sending a message of completeness. All ears are glued to the weather reports and combines and grain trucks run through the night if there is a threat of rain. Meals are brought out to the fields and it's all hands on deck until it is done. As one farmer finishes his fields he joins with his neighbour to finish theirs until all are done. On the last days it is not unusual to see 5 or 6 combines running in a slightly staggered formation through the fields.

These images of a prairie harvest have brought Thanksgiving to life for me. Our scripture today reminds me of this image of the combines running and the birds migrating and look of the land freshly cut and collected; and I find the words to this hymn have new meaning; Come you thankful people come, raise the song of harvest home. All is safely gathered in, safe before the storms begin. God our maker does provide for our needs to be supplied, come to God's own temple come, raise the song of harvest home.

Our reading from Joel talks about the good harvest making up for years of not so good. The author of Joel assures the people that God is with them evident by the good harvest. A wonderful image for Thanksgiving. But what if the harvest hadn't been good? What if the rain prevents the harvest and the grain remains in the fields to rot under the water? What if locusts or other pests had come and destroyed the crop? What would happen to Thanksgiving?

Would there still be turkey and dressing, potatoes and squash, pie and cool whip? Chances are Thanksgiving would still come and like the Who's down in Whoville who gathered in the town centre to sing even after the Grinch stole Christmas, we would still gather on this day and give thanks.

But why? What would we have to be thankful for? Our answer is in 1 Timothy 2: 1-7. This letter from Paul to Timothy opens urging Timothy to remain in Ephesus even though things seem grim; to teach love that comes in a pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith. Then in v.2 Paul tells Timothy how to do it.

How?

With supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving made for everyone. The importance of these instructions is on...everyone. When the people are being asked to offer these prayers they are to include those they may not want to like the rulers of the day who may not be of the same mind as the Christians. Prayers for those in high positions to give them a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

It's about thanks-giving. Giving thanks not receiving favours. We hold this day aside to give thanks even for those things that make life hard. The downers; the rulers; the bad crops. Giving thanks is what keeps our spirits up. It can turn us around and make us feel good. In the midst of terrible situations giving thanks can help us to see there is hope.

Hope in a time of trouble and faith at a time when it is hard to see the good.

This Thanksgiving many Canadian families will be grieving losses of young men and women in war.

This Thanksgiving many families will be torn apart from abuse – physical, emotional – abuse of substances and abuse of power.

This Thanksgiving many families will not have enough to eat, or sufficient housing.

This Thanksgiving there will be young people on the streets, lost in the world of living on the streets. Perhaps not ever knowing what it is like to have a Thanksgiving day, or meal, or family gathering.

The Thanksgiving many Canadian families will be rejoicing in the birth of new babies; and the anniversaries reached; birthdays celebrated and weddings performed creating new families.

This Thanksgiving there will be new traditions formed and old ones continued.

This Thanksgiving we will pause to give thanks that will include each other. We are asked to give a part of ourselves through our prayers to the hope of the world. Our faith will help to create a prayer that gives thanks for the good and the bad. Giving thanks helps to create a positive message that moves into the world to the places of hurt and disease.

Positive energy sent out to the world in Jesus name. We send our prayer of hope into the world; giving thanks for each other and the community we have here. Giving thanks for the harvest and all that it means. Giving thanks for the people we don't even know, who also give thanks this day.

All the world is God's own field, harvests for God's praise to yield; wheat and weeds together sown, here for joy or sorrow grown; first the blade, and then the ear, then the full corn shall appear: Harvest-giver, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be.

Come you thankful people come!