
"Your Word is a Light Unto My Path" - Psalm 119:105

Thanks giving Day?

Fattened fowl?

What does it mean to you, Thanksgiving Day? Some will probably respond, "Oh, it's just another holiday." Or, "It's a day when you get to re-acquaint yourself with close and not-so-close relatives." And don't forget that fattened fowl, the turkey! Others may suggest that this occasion is celebrated every year because of some tradition. And that is probably close to the truth.

Pilgrim Fathers?

Our American neighbours, and most Canadians too, generally consider the arrival of the "Pilgrim Fathers" in November 1620 to be the real origin of our present-day Thanksgiving Day celebration. The Pilgrims, as they called themselves, left England to seek a life with greater freedoms. They sailed on a ship called "Mayflower," landing, after a very difficult ocean voyage, at the rocky

shoreline of what is now the Cape Cod area of Massachusetts. They named the place Plymouth, after their port of departure in England. And, yes, they did have their first "thanksgiving-for-the-harvest" feast the next fall with the wild turkeys some friendly natives had taught them to catch. The earliest recorded official Thanksgiving Day was celebrated on December 4, 1619 by settlers in what became the State of Virginia "to express gratitude to God for the harvest." Giving thanks to God for plenty, as those early settlers did, is the primary reason for our modern-day Thanksgiving Day.

God's providence

But a far more profound motive for this holiday is our expression of gratitude to the Creator and Sustainer for the many bountiful blessings we receive every day. There are few people who callously believe that everything "just happens." Most people believe

that there is something that is greater than us looking after the world. Christians call it God's providence. My dictionary defines providence as "the foreseeing care and guardianship of God over His creatures." Or, as Christians profess, "God's providence is His almighty and ever present power whereby, as with His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures." This providence of God is what we should be mindful of on Thanksgiving Day. The pilgrims certainly acknowledged it. When they founded a small settlement on what became the State of Rhode Island, they named it: Providence.

He cares about us!

It is with a sense of gratitude, then, that we view our relationship with God. Our consciousness about God is sometimes real and near, but at other times very remote. It is near when disasters, such as 9-11 strike; then far away, when all appears to be just humming

along. Let's face it: we often feel we have no need for God. How wrong we are. And yet He cares about us! Is that not abundant reason for gratitude? We read in the Gospel of John that He loved the world. In fact, in addition to providing for our physical needs, He has given us all a way out of our spiritual misery. He gave the dearest gift of all: His only Son! God in heaven gave His Son for us, for He loved us. The actual wording of the text reads - and you have probably read it or heard it quoted somewhere - "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" John 3:16.

God rescued us

Martin Luther once wrote: "Since Christ accepted the thief on the cross just as he was, and received Paul after all his blasphemies and persecutions, we have no reason to despair... What do you think it means that He has given His only son? It means that He also offers whatever else He possesses." Someone else once stated: "God rescued us from dead-end alleys and dark dungeons. He has set us up in the Kingdom of the Son He loves so much, the Son who got us out of the pit we were

in, got rid of the sins we were doomed to keep repeating... God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these 'nobodies' to expose the hollow pretensions of the 'somebodies.'" God's only Son, Jesus Christ, is the one who was sent to keep us all from perishing. Jesus wants to save us from a dreadful, horrible end. He wants to be our Saviour; and He can save us, because of His divinity.

He came to save sinners!

"But," as John Stott, the well-known Bible expounder, states it, "can we really believe that [Jesus] was also in some sense God? Is not the deity of Jesus a rather picturesque Christian superstition? Is there any evidence for the amazing Christian assertion that the carpenter of Nazareth was the unique Son of God? Suppose Jesus was the Son of God; is basic Christianity merely an acceptance of the fact? No. Once persuaded of the deity of his person, we must examine the nature of his work. What did he come to do? The biblical answer is, he 'came into the world to save sinners.' Jesus of Nazareth is the heaven-sent Saviour we sinners need."

To be with us always

We are living in an age when truth, especially the truths that our forefathers saw as pillars of their spiritual basis, is being eroded. Truth is like a 'floating decimal point' nowadays; it appears to be wherever one wishes it to be. Therefore it is not in the least surprising, then, that the younger generation is confused. They are being shoved to and fro, from fad to fad, from idol to idol, by devious advertising campaigns. In short, they are being manipulated. Without an absolute truth, it is not surprising that teen suicides are on the rise. There is despair! But there is also a way out of this: God gave His only Son to rescue us out of this spiritual mire. And for that we can give thanks to God. Yes, we give thanks for that turkey and for all of our daily needs too. We especially give thanks to our Creator and Sustainer for all of that, and for the harvest. There are many blessings to reflect on. In anxious times such as we are experiencing, we can come before the Lord in prayer; as we read in Holy Scripture, "*Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you*" 1 Peter 5:7. Christ Jesus, our Lord, has also promised to be

"with you always to the very end of the age" Matthew 28:20.

He will give you rest

What will your Thanksgiving weekend be like? Will you be able to reflect on the many blessings received in good health, family and friends, etc.? Or are you so distraught, hurt or mired in difficulties that you cannot contemplate enjoying anything? Then remember Him who beckons: "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28.

By D. Mulder



DO YOU PRAY?

Jesus prayed!

There have probably been thousands upon thousands of articles written on the subject of prayer. A large diversity in opinion and theory on the aspects, usefulness, validity and method of prayer are all presented. All that information makes it very hard to determine just what prayer is and how (if at all) we are supposed to use it. Is prayer really a practical and useful thing today? Is it just something Christians and members of other religions do to make themselves feel better? Or is there something more to prayer than just venting your problems and frustrations to the sky?

When looking at any aspect of life and history, it's important to go back to the source. The most definitive source on prayer comes from the one who created it, commands it and teaches it. Jesus himself prayed constantly and specifically taught his disciples to pray. His explanations on the purpose and power of prayer went far beyond that of modern day psychology and "emotional wellness" teaching. What did Jesus say about prayer?

Since we are all living on earth and our Creator is in heaven, it can seem like there is an unimaginable distance between God and us. How can he hear us when we cry out about our pain and the pain of those we love? Jesus and God the Father himself have made it very clear that when we bow our heads and truly open our hearts to seek him in prayer that we are standing in the throne room of heaven itself. God not only hears what we are saying, he hears what we're not saying or are unable to say.

Who to pray to?

The Japanese would sometimes have a special tree in their yards that had a unique purpose for the family. A family member in great anger or sorrow could go to the tree and scream out all the rage, anger, frustration and pain inside their soul. The tree would listen silently to them, the person would find release, and there would be harmony in the home. Is prayer simply our version of a tree to scream at? Do we just call to God and then walk away feeling a temporary release of emotional pressure?

Christ told us that we are in the Father's presence. Despite the failings or absence of many of our earthly fathers, we are aware of how a true father acts when a child of his comes to him in pain. As a father myself, I don't just listen to my children when they come crying to me. I hold them, I try to understand their pain and I comfort, reassure and teach them about the pain they

are dealing with. From a scraped knee to a bruised heart, my children will run to dad and expect and receive the comfort and help they are looking for.

Understandably I have my moments when I'm not at my best. I get busy and don't always have the time to listen in detail. I get tired, sick, and irritable. At times I just don't want to be bothered by them. But I have a model of a father that constantly reminds me what fatherhood is really about. Our Father in Heaven does not ever get too busy to hear us. He is never sick and He is never uninterested in our prayers. I know that when I come to him in pain or in praise He eagerly wants to have me come near and speak to him.

Unanswered prayers

The question naturally comes to mind then about answered and unanswered prayers. As children we asked for lots of things from our parents that they wisely withheld from us, sometimes just for a while. I didn't understand their reasons then, just like I so often don't understand God's reasons now. Why pain in my life or in the lives of those close to me? Why so many unanswered questions? Like the child that comes running to daddy, I know that my father in heaven has my ultimate best in mind. I know that all things that I experience or struggle with are part of a process and great design by the only one who can possibly understand ALL aspects of a situation. All we can see is the thing that brings us to God, He sees how that fits into the rest of our life and the lives of all those we'll ever come in contact with. Only God can possibly know what's really best for us, and what we really need. And if we come to him as his children, he WILL provide us what we need. That is His promise, and no promise of God ever failed to pass the test.

God is not a Santa in Heaven. God is not a tree to scream at, or a mere psychological release. God is our Creator and the one who taught us to pray is our personal Saviour. It is understanding those things that brings me to my knees every day in the knowledge that I cannot face everything life throws at me by myself. It is understanding that a humble heart and an awareness of my own failings are what God wants to see in me. Then I'm open to instruction and open to receive the blessings that pour from heaven into my life. Then I can genuinely thank God for the vast amount of wonderful things around me. Then I can honestly express my struggles and pain to him and receive help.

He is waiting for us

Ever been too busy, too frustrated, too pressured or in too much pain to pray? It's at those times that we need to pray the most. Pray alone

with God, or have a friend come alongside you and pray with you. Some have never prayed or simply don't know how to. Jesus taught us where to find our comfort so that we would show others. Jesus also opened the way to this comfort by dying on the cross. If you believe that, there is real power and real relief in the arms of your Father. We just have to remember to run to Him, but when we do, we know He is there waiting for us with outstretched arms.

Speaking to GOD

As we come daily to God in prayer we will have our hearts and minds opened to the power of the Father in our lives. We see more and more how all good things come not by fate or chance, but by His hand. It's at that time that we cannot help but praise Him. Jesus once told his critics that even if his followers would be silent then the rocks would cry out to God. As the Creator and

provider of all things he is worthy of our praise and our adoration. It is good to begin our prayers with remembering the power and worthiness of God. When we begin that way we immediately have the confidence and comfort in knowing that we are speaking to a God who not only has the power to meet our needs, but the love that ensures He will.

Need help praying? Why not come and pray with us in church? Together as God's people we call upon Him in the Name of Christ every Sunday for all that we need. Together as sinners we ask His forgiveness and pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit - things we *all* need.

- Martin VanWoudenberg
October 07, 2002



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