

Give Thanks
Matthew 6:25-33
November 18, 2018 – Twenty-Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

What a wonderful day in the life of our church!!! What better day to receive new members than the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Yes, Thursday is Thanksgiving, and we all have so much to be thankful for. God has truly blessed each of us in amazing ways.

Last week was Stewardship Sunday, and in the weeks leading up to Stewardship Sunday I spoke about how God has blessed us and how God has called us to be a blessing to those less fortunate than ourselves. I hope you truly considered that when you completed your Estimate of Giving Cards. (You know we always tell you, if your life situation changes, you are always free to revise your Estimate of Giving. Usually that's interpreted as being revised downward; but Ed, our financial secretary, also tells me it's also okay for you to revise it upward.) Still, this is not a sermon about finances; other than to say that our financial security, to whatever extent we are financially secure, is certain one of the many things that we can be thankful for this Thanksgiving.

As we recognize our newest members to North Olmsted UMC, I hope you will all give thanks for the church. I truly appreciated the words that some of our lay members brought during our stewardship moments these past weeks. Not just because they encouraged us to support the church; but because they truly highlighted what it means to be the church. Sharon and I used to laugh as friends would comment, "It must be so peaceful to work in the church." Well, I need to tell you, it is not "peaceful" to work in this church. There are always people coming and going. There are meetings going on. There is food being shared. There are people stopping in for assistance. There are people calling to report joys or to express concerns. Yes, this is a "happening" place, and we would not want it any other way. I have often thought, "If this were a peaceful place, it would be a dead place; and we are truly blessed that our church is alive and well."

Our church is a place where we make life-long friends, friends who, as the saying goes, "you can call at three o'clock in the morning." Our church is a place where we share in celebration; and our church is a place where we wrap our arms around those who are suffering and those who are grieving. Indeed, it is a joy to welcome our newest members into our church family; as we give thanks to God for the gift of the church.

Our church also offers opportunities to serve; and I have repeatedly stated that there is real joy in service. In a couple weeks we'll be commissioning our newest Stephen Ministers. What's a Stephen Minister – a lay person specially trained to listen, specially trained to share the love of Christ, specially trained to be a welcome presence in times of need. I have often quoted Theresa of Avila who said, Christ has no hands but your hands, Christ has no feet but your feet. She

wasn't speaking just to clergy; and she wasn't speaking just to Stephen Ministers. No, she was speaking to every Christian; for every Christian is called, called by nature of their baptism to go forth and serve. And so, I believe, on this Thanksgiving we should all give thanks for the opportunity to serve.

And this brings me to today's scripture reading. Jesus says, "Don't worry about your life, what you'll eat or drink, or what you will wear. Only have faith that God will take care of that." Now, as I've said many times before, I also believe that God expects us to take care of ourselves. I have preached on how we must love ourselves, as we go forth to love others. But I have also stated often, in children's sermons, that I am truly blessed. In sixty-five plus years of life, I have never had to worry that I would not have enough food to eat. I have never known the refrigerator to be empty. I have never been what sociologists call "food insecure." I suspect that some of you cannot say that. Some of you have had a harder life than I. I also suspect that many of you are in the same situation that I am in. You may have questioned, "What will we fix for dinner"; but you never said, "We have absolutely no food and absolutely no money, and my family will need to go hungry."

Now, I struggled a bit with this scripture, as I recognize that 47% of the people in the world are food insecure at least some of the time; and I am certainly not going to tell you that they are food insecure because they don't have enough faith. There are televangelists preaching what is called "the prosperity gospel" that will say exactly that; but I simply don't believe it. I do believe that, as Christians, we should do whatever we can to insure that all people are food secure, and we should pray for those who are not. But this Thanksgiving, I call each of us to simply give thanks for the food that is on our tables, the cloths that are on our backs and the roofs that are over our heads, not just this Thursday, be everyday of the year.

Our scripture concludes with a call to "desire first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and all the other things will be given to you as well." We pray that every Sunday. Every Sunday we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." That's what it means to desire the kingdom of God – "thy kingdom come" and God's righteousness – "thy will be done on earth." I hope you pray that every day. But I also hope you live that every day. I've said it a thousand times before, and I'll continue to say it until the day I die. I pray that I may always share the good news of God's amazing love by my thoughts, but more importantly by my words, and most importantly be my deeds.

Friends, it's Thanksgiving Sunday. Thursday is Thanksgiving. For many, Thursday is a busy day. It's a day shared with family. It's a day celebrated with food. It's a day of cooking and a day of football. And, still I ask, as I have asked every Thanksgiving, may it also be a time of prayer. Take some time during the day to give thanks and praise to God, and I'm speaking of more than a quick prayer before the huge Thanksgiving feast. Take the time to think of the many blessings

God has given you: food and clothes and shelter, family and friends, opportunities to celebrate and opportunities to serve; and yes, the gift of the church. Take time to think of the joys you have shared, and the people who have comforted you in your sorrows. Then, give thanks. Give thanks and praise to God; and give God all the glory.

Let us pray. . .

Most Holy Lord,

Thank you.

Thank you for the many blessing you have given us.

May we use every blessing to be a blessing to others.

And may we give you all the thanks, all the praise, and all the glory.

Amen.

Rev. Mark L. Steiger, Pastor
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