

On Thursday, many of us will get up early. We'll stuff the turkey and get it in the oven while the rest of the family is still in dreamland. A little bit later, the kids (or grandchildren), tablets in hand, will plunk themselves in front of the TV and watch the Macy's Parade while the tantalizing scents of roasting potatoes, stuffing, and turkey fill the air. You'll gather with extended family and friends for a sumptuous meal followed by cakes and pies.

Imagine with me that you're all seated around the table. Before one fork is lifted, go with me to the moment that you bow your head and someone says grace. What's it been like at your house? Quick and fairly sedate? Long and loud? And do you spend more time thinking about the prayer or the drumstick? Have you spent more time talking about what you're thankful for...or asking for the recipe for the marshmallow-topped yams?

Thanksgiving. It's a holiday, but it's also a word used freely in the Bible, often with the word 'praise' in front of it. As in, praise and thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is a holiday and word, but it's even more. As Christians, it's a way of life, really, because we've already received God's grace.

The scripture passage this morning speaks of how all things were created in Christ and how, through Christ, we are reconnected with God and God's kingdom. What a blessing! Thank God!

Grace: a polite little word used to convey a **world** of thanks. Grace, defined as 'something given, though unmerited'. Grace is the foundation of our life. It's a word that underscores God's goodness and soothes anxiety, while also invoking joy.

We're reminded in our Scripture today that we should endure 'what is' while joyfully giving thanks to the Father for the many gifts He has already given us. That's grace. Pastor Stan Ott says that, "Grace simply means, "God's gift—God's gift of love, mercy, forgiveness, and help." (BuildingOneAnother.com, newsletter, Nov 12, 2019)

God's grace is given freely. We did not--and do not--earn grace. We are the recipients of God's love, attention, peace, and care because God is good, (not because we are). Now, don't misunderstand, we're not bad, but it's not because of us that we get God's grace. It's because of God.

We're reminded that Jesus is the source of our blessing. He's the image of the invisible God. By being in relationship with Jesus, we can see the face of God. It's much more powerful than a glimpse at a hidden deity, a sneak peek behind the curtain. Seeing the face of God-- in Christ—is being handed life's little instruction workbook....and a pencil with an eraser so that we can try things again and again, in new ways, until we get them right. Seeing the face of God—in Christ—means we can look into an aspirational mirror. He's the perfect role model of the way we are to interact with creatures and creation. Even when we're stressed or slighted or sad. Even when things aren't fair. Endure 'what is' while giving thanks to the Father for the many gifts he's already given.

Verse 17 says, "...in him *all things* hold together". Jesus is the glue that holds our lives together, the glue that holds our church together, and the glue that holds our world together. Jesus is what tethers us to one another. Where two or more are gathered in his name, he is there...here. God with us. God between us. God among us. And we, the church, make up the body of Christ. Our scripture passage invites us to reflect on **connection**: connection to God and, through Jesus, to one another and all the world.

If we think about connection in the context of the Thanksgiving meal, we can quickly see that we have far-reaching connections. When you sit down to your dinner, think about those who have planted and harvested the food, trucked it to the store, stocked it, rung it up, carried it into the house, and served it and you'll become aware that your gratitude can extend beyond just the hands that prepared the meal. We can be grateful for connections seen and unseen. Those we are consciously aware of and those we rarely call to mind.

Many of you have brought in non-perishables today for the York Food Pantry. Thank you! It's powerful to think of what happens once you drop that can of green beans up front. Your individual contributions will be matched with others so that one person's green beans and another's mushroom soup will make a green bean casserole when combined with yet another person's French's fried onions. It's about connection.

This is also how church works. Each of us does what we can and, together, we are able to provide hope, help, healing, comfort and inspiration to hundreds of people each week. Each of us gives what we can and together, we can serve a congregation and a community.

Today is Gratitude Sunday here at First Parish. The word gratitude is derived from the Latin word gratia, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness (depending on the context). In some ways, gratitude encompasses all of these meanings. Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what you receive, whether tangible or intangible. When you hold a grateful perspective, you are essentially acknowledging that the good in your life is coming, at least in part, from beyond you—from outside of solely your efforts. Given that, gratitude helps us to connect to one another—and to things beyond our circles.

God is freely sharing the currency of love. We've been rescued from darkness, despair, desperation. We've been forgiven for the reckless and thoughtless things we've done. Christ's power doesn't stem from money or influence or control, but it comes instead from freely giving life changing lessons. Ultimately, we not only get entrance into the kingdom, but get to be there with others who radiate love and light because they too, have been transformed by Jesus.

That's what church is about: the difference Jesus makes in each of our lives---and, because of that--- the transformation that occurs internally and externally, in our lives and in our world. And so, for all we have received through God's grace and Christ's teachings, **we can share our gratitude by giving back to God.**

Gratitude Sunday is a time for us to acknowledge that we've been blessed beyond measure and to recognize that we share a great honor and responsibility in being entrusted with the stewardship of the gospel (and as a way to share that good news); this church. We are caretakers of Christ's precious community. Through our generosity of spirit and of practically pooling our funds, our voices, our hands and our hearts, we can make the world better. **Thanks be to God that we get to be a part of this sacred work!** Blessed be and amen.