

Message: “Behind the Scenes”**Happy Thanksgiving!**

I hope your household is filled with laughter, joy and life on Thanksgiving. It’s a uniquely American experience. The holiday is rooted in the early days of the settlers who were helped by indigenous Native Americans. They were grateful for what they received. It helped them survive the harsh winter.

Thanksgiving as we know it today was given its greatest boost by President Abraham Lincoln, who made it a national holiday in 1863.

Much of the credit goes to Sara Josepha Hale, a prominent writer and editor, often called the Mother of Thanksgiving. The hope of these leaders was that a day of giving thanks would help “heal the wounds of the nation”¹ after years of civil war. With the help of William Sewell’s writing, Lincoln made this proclamation,

“I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a Day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent [God] who dwells in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up the ascriptions justly due to [God] for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to [God’s] tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.”²

¹ <https://www.history.com/news/abraham-lincoln-and-the-mother-of-thanksgiving>

² https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/transcript_for_abraham_lincoln_thanksgiving_proclamation_1863.pdf

As we gather - friends, family and new acquaintances, let's remember the intent behind thanksgiving. It begins with giving thanks and praise to God, and then it continues by offering care to those who are in need due to the violence and conflict that fill our culture. Finally, it calls for healing and restoration so we can fully enjoy peace and harmony, in oneness with each other.

That's good advice on how to live our faith in real practical ways. I believe John Wesley, our founder, would approve. We're in a time of great turmoil. Everything we know or have held onto is being challenged, from the way we govern and what governance means to what lies at the heart of faith. Combatants have a new tool to use: we weaponize things. We weaponize politics, weaponize faith and we are learning to weaponize any point of view that is different than ours.

It's a time of great uncertainty and doubt. Great harm is done, even by those who profess faith. It's hard for the goodness of God to find a voice. And we are certainly not staying in love with God.

That's why our mission possible is so important.

We are called by Jesus to be the body of Christ on earth. That means living by faith. That's a call to live authentic, intentional lives filled with love and grace. The way Jesus shows us is a way of peace and hope. It requires radical hospitality. We need quiet courage to live this way. We have a spiritual voice that has been absent, but which is so needed today.

When we follow the path of inviting and connecting to God and other people, we are led to the most important part: engaging with others. One analogy is a thanksgiving dinner. Everyone is invited to come: family, friends and neighbors. Once people arrive, they'll spend time connecting with each other. It might be at the dinner table. It could be in a touch football game or watching a game or the Macy's Day parade on TV. It may be sitting down for a quiet moment, catching up with someone we haven't seen in a while.

Do you know where those who are engaging are? Several places. They're the behind-the-scenes people who are helping others to come and enjoy the day. It's the host or hostess, who planned and prepared for the event. It's the person who makes everyone welcome when they come, giving them something to drink, making introductions and caring for their needs. It's the cooks who are putting the meal together, making sure each dish is just right. It's the person who sits down with you to see how you are, the one who really cares about what you have to say. They're looking for God in each moment.

Those are the people who are engaging. They're showing others how do to do the same thing. We learn to invite people by seeing how others do it and then trying it our own, unique way. We learn to connect with other people, making friends and building relationships. We begin to see how God is at work in the lives of others in wonderful ways that open our eyes. We learn how to create spaces for these kinds of connections to happen when we learn how to engage.

It doesn't matter if the turkey is a little dry or if Uncle Ned spills his drink – again. That isn't important.

What matters is you care enough to get involved. You help out in a non-anxious, loving way because you care and you want to be part of building something new. Maybe it's a new household. Maybe it's a new group. Maybe it's a new relationship with God. Maybe it's a new sense of purpose, helping others to see what God has done for you. No matter what it is, it's a reason to be thankful.

I invite you to get involved as we enter this holiday season.

Invite someone over for Thanksgiving. Meet a friend for coffee, rather than sending a card. Bless someone by praying for them. Best of all, invite them to join a small group and spend time learning who Jesus is for themselves. Your life and the life of the one you engage with will be made better by faith.

Let us go and make disciples of Jesus Christ together.

Let us pray

John 15:11-17 (CEB)

I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you. You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. I give you these commandments so that you can love each other.

Acts 6:1-7 (CEB)

About that time, while the number of disciples continued to increase, a complaint arose. Greek-speaking disciples accused the Aramaic-speaking disciples because their widows were being overlooked in the daily food service. The Twelve called a meeting of all the disciples and said, “It isn't right for us to set aside proclamation of God's word in order to serve tables. Brothers and sisters, carefully choose seven well-respected men from among you. They must be well-respected and endowed by the Spirit with exceptional wisdom. We will put them in charge of this concern. As for us, we will devote ourselves to prayer and the service of proclaiming the word.” This proposal pleased the entire community. They selected Stephen, a man endowed by the Holy Spirit with exceptional faith, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. The community presented these seven to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. God's word continued to grow. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased significantly. Even a large group of priests embraced the faith.