

## "A TIME TO GIVE THANKS"

TEXT: "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,  
and into His courts with praise. Give  
thanks to Him and bless His name."

(Psalm 100: 4)

INTRODUCTION I came across a short story recently about a young couple who kept a bottle of champagne from their wedding day and decided to save it for a very special occasion. Several holidays came and went. Some anniversaries were celebrated and still the bottle remained untouched on the top shelf. The first child was born, and then a second. A major promotion was met with much rejoicing, but not with champagne. And so the years went by...about a dozen or more. Finally, they came to the realization that waiting any longer was silly, and so they opened the bottle and were surprised to discover that the champagne had completely dried up. I don't know enough about champagne...but that's the story.

How often this sort of thing happens to us as we move along through life. We put off certain things, always waiting for something better. We're too busy, always looking for something bigger. It applies to us at Thanksgiving time. How many people really take the time to be thankful? It was St. Augustine who once said "that a Christian should be an 'alleluia' from head to foot". How do we measure up?

DEVELOPMENT We put off giving thanks so often and for so long that sometimes we forget not only to give thanks, but also forget that for which we are thankful. And if we aren't careful, our well-springs of joy and of gratitude can become as dry as that bottle of champagne that remained untouched for so long.

Karl E. Lutze published a number of prayers some time ago under the title, Forgive Our Forgettings, Lord! He wrote the following about our busy lives:

"I have so much on my mind so many mornings; not that I want not to thank you, Lord. But there's so little time to think - and if I do not think, I find myself absorbed in making myself presentable, tending to little things I should have done last night. I have to be in a certain place at a certain time with certain people. And there are other things to remember.

Yes, I remember things...I forget people"

"But there's so little time to think...not that I want not to thank you". "I remember things....I forget people". Gratitude is a much neglected virtue in the world, and even in the Church. I say "even" because as every psalm and hymn-singing Christian should know, gratitude is the primary religious emotion. Duty calls only when gratitude fails to prompt.

If we wish to trace Thanksgiving back through the centuries, we'll find it an essentially pagan feast. When the harvest is home, there must be a harvest-home supper. Like so many holidays, Thanksgiving rises out of something basic and profound in the nature of man.

THANKSGIVING In the Thanksgivings of our childhood, we were all little Pilgrims. Remember how our elders spent all day cooking, feasting, toasting...and marveling that the Lord had brought us all through another year.

We all felt cherished. And we knew we'd grow up remembering the day, bound to honor the feast of a roasted turkey and a hot mince pie. Now, within the grim circumference of our time and the needs of so many, some feel guilty about it.

More than once I have expressed the thought from this pulpit that it would be well for us to have two or three Thanksgiving Days each year. Not simply to remind us of our many blessings and to cultivate the grace of gratitude, but also to renew our sense of concern and pity for the unblest of our land, many of whom we do not see. Some of them who are unblest are on in years, many of them will be dining alone in drab little rooms next Thursday, or holding out their thick, chipped plates for a slice of turkey at the Salvation Army. I'm pleased to see our Church respond to such community organizations as Search and Care and the Yorkville Common Pantry.

Of all our holidays, Thanksgiving seems the most American and probably one of the most loved. It's non-sectarian. It's wreathed in generosity and in thankfulness. No day is so firmly rooted in our colonial past. That bit of history that launched a billion turkeys into an infinite bog of cranberry sauce was set down by one of the Pilgrim fathers in prose that still takes the heart with its innocence.

"Our harvest being gotten in, our Governor sent four men on fowling so we might, after a special manner, rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help, served the company almost a week."

This account does not mention, as Frances Dillon points out in his book, The Pilgrims that the Indians fattened the feast by sending along five deer. A nice little extra, to be sure.

TO GIVE THANKS There's a half-forgotten story about an early settlement on the New England shore that is worth remembering. After the first two difficult years, this colony gathered in a modest harvest, caught cod aplenty, took venison, and had substantial cabins for shelter. They had even made friends with the Indians. But some people were dubious about the Winter ahead, particularly the leaders and so a Day of Prayer was decreed along with a time of fasting.

The people came together. They heard a long, opening prayer of apology for human weakness and shortcoming. It was followed by a long confession by one of the Elders, not only for himself but for the entire community. Others rose to detail the trials of life and their own sins and errors. The meeting droned on for three or four hours, till at last a little man stalked forward from the back of the room and said, "I must dissent. I have heard enough of sin and of damnation.

A startled gasp went through that room. The man continued.  
hurt,

"I have fasted till my belly griped, meditated my sins till my mind reeled, asked forgiveness till I was ashamed for asking. Now I must lift mine eyes in thanks, or lift them not at all!"

A sigh of relief was heard as he went on.

"We had privations. Some of us died. We froze and we starved. But now we have a harvest. We have wood for our fires. We have meat our eating, clothes to cover our bodies. Why do we abuse ourselves. What is our sin? - beyond the fact that we are still alive."

Then he lifted his head proudly and said,

"Let us be done with our whimpers and our complaints. Let us lift our hearts and thank the good Lord for the things we have and the work we still can do! And let us end this pointless fasting."

A murmur filled the room...a murmur of relief. The most eloquent confessors looked somewhat abashed. Neighbor turned to neighbor and for the first time that day there were smiles. There was human warmth. Life's whole complexion had changed. And within an hour the fire place spits were provisioned and turning, the pots were ~~simmering~~. Women cooked. Children were underfoot. Men brought plans and set up tables and benches. And before sundown that day of astring and prayer had become a day of feasting, a day of rejoicing, a time of true thanksgiving for every soul in that colony. And remembering something John Marquand once said about the Maine coast and how "it felt like an amateur when it saw how grim the Pilgrim fathers were"...we can appreciate the change that occurred.

CLOSING "A Time to Give Thanks" now approaches. Tom Wicker, writing in the NY Times a number of years ago offered this comment regarding Thanksgiving.

"Thanksgiving Day is a fine and a special day...clutter it as we may with indigestion and football. It is a time of the spirit, when we let it be, and a time of the heart, despite ourselves."

May it be for you and for all of us, "a time of the spirit....a time of the heart". A time when we pause for a little while in all we are doing...pause and remember and be grateful.

I would like to close this message by reading to you the Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, dated November 15th. Over the years I have kept the various Presidential Thanksgiving Day Proclamations. I've often wondered who pens them, for they're all good and in a few words capture so much of what Thanksgiving is all about.

#### THE PROCLAMATION

PRAYER As we now approach our national day of Thanksgiving, O God, move us to express our feelings of gratitude to you...and to each other...and to all who have enriched our lives. And as we share in the blessings of this day, in a land that has been abundantly blessed, let us remember that "to whom much is given, much also is expected." Therefore, let our thanks include a giving to others. For we hunger not for bread, but for practical ways to unite our persons concerns with practical measures that others may be blessed even as we ourselves have been blessed. In the spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen

## Thanksgiving Day Proclamation

WASHINGTON, Nov. 15 (AP) — Following is the text of President Carter's Thanksgiving Day proclamation:

The White House

By the President of the United States of America

### A Proclamation

The greatest bounty of our nation is the bounty of our heritage — our diversity as immigrants and descendants of immigrants, our common identity as Americans.

We have set aside one day a year to give thanks for all that we have, yet Thanksgiving is more than just a day of celebration. It is also a commemoration — of the day America's earliest inhabitants sat down to table with European colonists.

That occasion was historic, but not only because it established a national holiday, but because it marked the start of a national tradition of cooperation, unity and tolerance.

Even in times of trial and frustration, we have much to be thankful for in our personal lives and in our nation. As we pause on Thanksgiving to offer thanks to God, we should not forget that

we also owe thanks to this country's forefathers who had the vision to join together in Thanksgiving and who gave us so much of the vision of brotherhood that is ours today.

THEREFORE I, Jimmy Carter, President of the United States of America, do proclaim Thursday the 27th of November, 1980, as Thanksgiving Day. I call upon all the people of our nation to give thanks on that day for the blessings Almighty God has bestowed upon us and to join the fervent prayer of George Washington, who as President asked God to "impart all the blessings we possess or ask for ourselves to the whole family of mankind."

IN WITNESS THEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 13th day of November in the year of our Lord 1980 and of the independence of the United States of America.

JIMMY CARTER

PASTORAL PRAYER: January 18, 1981

GOD, OUR FATHER, AND LORD OF THE CHURCH,

We come to You as sheep...separated into many flocks...  
but claiming One Shepherd.

We come into Your Presence as a "broken body"...with limb  
separated from limb, but singing, "all one body we!"

We come as branches reaching out in many different directions,  
but claiming to be a part of one tree.

We come this hour as Disciples divided into denominations,  
but with One Master, One Saviour.

WE PRAY, FATHER, for renewal and then for reunion of Your Church.

Show us our selfish ways.

If we are seeking our own glory and not your glory, help  
us to see our small, selfish patterns.

If we make the Church an object of worship, turn us  
again to You who alone is to be worshipped.

Help us always to remember that we belong to Christ, and  
not that He belongs to us only...but to others  
who may speak in tongues other than our own....and worship You  
in ways different from ours.

WE KNOW FROM OUR PAST:

That the POWER for unity is through Your spirit.

That the REASON for unity is through our common calling and  
mission.

That the HOPE of our unity is through the gift of Your love.

WE PRAY, LORD, for every Church in this community...in this city...in this  
state.

Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox..

Large and small, rich and poor.

Urban and suburban,

Cathedral and store front.

Charismatic and pentecostal.

UNITE US, LORD OF THE PRESENT -

With a new sense of community.

With a new spirit of compassion.

With a new strength of commitment.

Strengthen our commitment to the vision and dream of One Church,  
One World...built on the brotherhood of man, under the fatherhood  
of a God, revealed in Christ. Yea, Lord. It is high time to let  
it be!

In the spirit of Christ,  
we pray.

LAY READER: Len Williams

BEFORE The Old Testament Reading for today is taken from the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 58. Verses 6 - 12. It is found on page 638 in the Bible that is in the pews.... (pause for a few seconds while people locate it).

And the New Testament Reading is taken from the Gospel of Luke. Chapter 19. Verses 41 - 44. This reading is found on page 913 in the Bible.

(Pause for about 5 seconds before starting in...just to make sure people have found the pages...)

AFTER The closing phrase is on a card, taped to the upper right hand corner of the lectern.....it is:

"THUS ENDETH THE READINGS TAKEN FROM THE SCRIPTURE.  
MAY GOD ADD HIS BLESSING TO THE READING OF HIS WORD  
AND TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF IT. AMEN"

ANNOUNCEMENTS: January 18, 1981

GREETING We greet the visitors in the congregation today. We're pleased to have you with us and we do hope that the opportunity will be ours to greet you in a more personal way before you depart - either at the door following the service, or downstairs in the Russell Room where tea and coffee and some light refreshments will be available.

Be free in the sharing of your name with us. Take a moment to fill out one of the Visitor cards or to sign one of the Guest Books in the narthex. Join us on other Sundays in our worship and in our fellowship in this Church that has been ministering in the name of Christ in this city since the year 1837. It is in His name that we today bid you a very warm welcome!

CONCERNS Be sure to pick up a copy of the January issue of our parish news-sheet "A Word In Edgeways" if you have not yet already done so. Copies are in the narthex by the door as well as on the table in the Russell Room.

We have another busy week before us in terms of evening meetings. Please note that the Education Committee will meet on Monday evening at 7:30. The Committee on Nominations will meet on Tuesday evening at 7:30. The Choir on Wednesday night at 6:15 pm. Now's a good time to consider joining the Choir as they prepare for a special musical program on Sunday, February 15th, with the choir of the Park Avenue Christian Church. More on that as we approach the date. Thursday evening the Indochinese Friends Committee will meet.

TODAY This morning - as apart of the coffee hour - the first of three Bake Sales will be held. As the bulletin says, "It's for a good cause!" Proceeds from the Bake Sales will help to undergird the All-Church Picnic of June 20th. Come on downstairs and make a purchase.

Also this morning....from 12:45 to about 1:45...there will be a special Adult Fellowship "Brainstorming Session"...please come and share your ideas with Jan Aldrich and others who coordinate Adult Fellowship programming in our Church. The place: the choir room. The time: around 12:45. Also note that reservations for the Adult Fellowship Winter Weekend should be pretty well set by now. It's two weeks from today and Jan Aldrich tells me that we still have place for two or three more. Winter Weekend, Warwick, NY....Friday night to Sunday afternoon.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Today marks the beginning of the 74th annual observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This is a time when Christians of every persuasion are urged to pray together for the courage and the strength and wisdom to overcome their many divisions.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity began at Graymoor, Garrison, NY in 1908. Within a few years it spread throughout the world, awakening Christians to the reality of our tragic disunity within the body of Christ. Those words are from the Metropolitan Church News, a publication of the Council of Churches of the City of New York.

We are privileged to have with us this morning the new Executive Director of the Council of Churches of the City of NY. We won't be able to call him "new" much longer for he is completing his 10th month in this position and according to a January 1st article in the NY Times, our guest preacher is regarded as one of the City's "famous...learned...and powerful" leaders.

Len Williams, Joseph King, and Joyce Veenstra - of our parish - call him "friend". Joyce Veenstra, chairperson of our Council on Ministries is going to "do the honors" this morning and introduce him to you.

FOLLOW-UP Thank you, Joyce. Following the singing of the second hymn, Dr. Polk will speak to us. May I also draw your attention to next Sunday and the pulpit exchange that is "in the works". Again, as a part of our celebration and observance of Christian Unity, Raymond Schulze of Immanuel Lutheran Church, will preach here and I will travel to 88th Street and Lexington Avenue and address his congregation.

A 9:30 forum on the theme "Lutherans and Methodists" together is planned. Friends from Immanuel Lutheran will be with us from 9:30 to 10:30 and meet with us in Fellowship Hall.

JESUS SAID

"It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit let us worship God with our morning offering.

"Lutherans and Methodists in Yorkville Get To Know Each Other"

PARK AVENUE



UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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106 East Eighty-Sixth Street,

New York, New York 10028 • Telephone AT 9-6997

*Philip A. C. Clarke*  
MINISTER

### YOUTH CHOIR APPEARANCE

According to the Bulletin, the Youth Choir of our Church is going to sing for us this morning.

The boys and girls are here and will be joining us in a moment....

The last time they sang in a service was on Christmas Eve...and all 17 boys and girls were present. How grateful we were to them.

### NEW ROBES

You'll be pleased to know that today the boys and girls are wearing their new choir robes which arrived recently. They plan to sing one number. It's entitled, "Stay In Touch With the World"...a good thought.

Directed by Mary Lou Risley, will you welcome with affection and appreciation the Youth Choir of our Church!

## "A TIME TO GIVE THANKS"

### INTRODUCTION

I remember a short story that I read a number of years ago about a couple who kept a bottle of champagne from their wedding day and decided to save it for a very special occasion. Several holidays came and went. The anniversaries were celebrated and still the bottle remained on the shelf. The first child was born, and then a second. A major promotion was met with rejoicing, but not with champagne. And so the years went by. Finally, they came to the realization that waiting any longer was silly, so they opened the bottle and were somewhat surprised to discover that the champagne had completely dried up.

How often this happens to us as we move along through life. We put off certain things, waiting for something better. We're too busy, always looking for something bigger. This especially applies to us at Thanksgiving time. How many people really take the time to be thankful? St. Augustine once said, "A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot". Does this describe the fabric of your life?

### DEVELOPMENT

We meet people on the street and say matter -of-factly, "How are you?" often not even expecting an answer. Should we get one, it is usually, "Oh, pretty good, I guess...better since my illness", or maybe an occasional "Great!" Chances are all of us would be startled to hear, "I'm so thankful for life and for all of its joys". We put off giving thanks so often and for so long that sometimes we forget not only to give thanks, but also forget that for which we are thankful. And if we aren't careful, our well-springs of joy and gratitude can become as dry as that bottle of champagne!

Karl E. Lutze recently published a number of prayers under the title of "Forgive our Forgettings, Lord!". He wrote the following about our busy lives:

"I have so much on my mind so many mornings; not that I want not to thank you. But there's so little time to think - and if I do not think, I find myself absorbed in making myself presentable, tending to little things I should have done last night. I have to be in a certain place at a certain time with certain people. And there are other things to remember - I remember things, and I forget people".

### THINK ABOUT TIME

"But there's so little time to think.....not that I want not to thank you". Let us think for a few moments here this morning about time. Time - or the lack of it - is our most overworked excuse for failing to stop....to reflect....and to be thankful.

There are different ways in which men comprehend and understand time. The early settlers of our country were more concerned with the cyclical nature of the Seasons, the quality of the crops. And the harvest before the harshness of the Winter was a constant reminder of the time and the need for some thanksgiving. Those who survived and had food to eat or share were very grateful. Time, for them, was measured in the present - yesterday forgotten, tomorrow a long way off.

We are not allowed the luxury of such a simple approach. We live in a world of watches, clocks, calendars, appointments. We are always checking, comparing, measuring. What time is it now? Will we be out of church by twelve? (It looks doubtful). In the morning, the radio announces the time every few minutes. Life

expectancies, the shopping days until Christmas. These are our reminders. Time is like money, for no one ever seems to have as much as he wants. The clock can be such a tyrant. We live under the pressure of time. Time to get up. Time to eat. Time to be at work. But time today - and again on Thursday - to pause and consider our blessings.

For others in our society, the problem is just the opposite. Time is a great emptiness that must be filled. Rather than a tyrant, time is a threat. A cartoon in a recent magazine showed a man having his fortune told by a woman who said, "You will have a long and a pointless life". With shorter working hours, earlier retirement, increased longevity, the average American will spend less than half his total life span working and sleeping. The rest of that time must be filled with activity. We pass the time, as though it must be endured. Days are filled with complaints and trials, rather than praise and opportunities. There is plenty of time for thanksgiving - later.

A STEP FURTHER Let me take this a step further. It is hardly an accident that the ancient Greeks had two words for time. The first word is chronos, which is the root of our word, "chronology". Time, in this sense, is something which is measurable. It's marked by the ticking of a watch, or the days of a calendar. We have a chronological date, Thanksgiving Day, set aside as a national day of thanksgiving.

The word word is kairos. And literally translated, it means the decisive time, the time of opportunity. It is the special moment that cuts into the passage of time. This second form, kairos, is found quite often in the scriptures. "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand".

In the Bible, no great importance is attached to chronos or chronological time, for its own sake. The real importance lays with kairos - that special decisive moment. Any point in time may, therefore, be the occasion for the divine encounter, the point at which we sense an impact from beyond and are given an opportunity to respond in faith and joy.

COME TO THANKSGIVING DAY Chronologically then, we all will arrive at Thanksgiving Day, perhaps even go to church, and not really feel thankful. This is understandable. There is much to cause our thoughts to be filled with anguish as we think about our land and our world. We come with doubts and wondering, with uncertainties and problems that seem almost too much at time. Few will eat next Thursday without recalling the needs of others. We feel guilty for having plenty while so much of the world starves.

And yet, despite all of this, there is something within us that causes us to "praise the Lord" - for life itself is good. We have a life, a faith - a faith to sustain us and steady us as we walk through life, a faith in others as well as in ourselves, a faith in tomorrow, a faith in a power greater than ourselves. We have a conscience that can identify and eventually redress the wrong of which man is capable. We know right from wrong; we know war from peace.

I like the words of Tom Wicker, taken from last Thanksgiving's NY Times:

"Thanksgiving Day is a fine and special day, clutter it as we may with indigestion and football. It is a time of the spirit, when we let it be, and a time of the heart, despite ourselves."

"A time of the spirit, when we let it be". You see the point of New Testament thought is not, as many have mistakenly thought, that the Kingdom of God is coming at a particular time or place that we can determine, but rather that it is an ever present possibility. We should learn to live our lives qualitatively, instead of quantitatively. A wise man once said, "Life is not anything; it is only the opportunity for something". And for this possibility of the Kingdom of God on earth - the kingdom of right relationships as some like to think of it - we are thankful. To that thought that chronological time and kairos may coincide and make our spirits receptive to the wonder and the mystery of life, to that possibility we should all respond with joy and gratitude.

We must deal creatively with time. We must face the reality of our chronological days and affirm their goodness. And if we could feel that each day was an opportunity for the working of God's spirit to bring about the fullness of time for something, then we would give thanks daily.

The habit or posture of thankfulness gives us a new perspective. We look at things from the vantage point of kairos instead of chronos. A newscaster one night was interviewing a mother of nine who had been moved into a welfare hotel. The whole family was in a one run-down room, in a building beset with filth, robberies, violence, and fear. Almost baiting this woman in an effort to have her lash out at these circumstances, the reporter was brought up short by her response. She said, "I praise the Lord every day that my children can eat and that we have a place to live and that He is looking out for me". We sometimes think that such a response is naive, unrealistic, or escapist, but it represents a different perspective - a life of praising the Lord all the day long.

So we gather today, and others will gather on Thursday - to give thanks. I hope that you are able to transform this chronological day into a true day of rejoicing. For as we learn to give thanks we realize our responsibility to do something in response.

There is a familiar passage in the Old Testament that speaks of time:

"To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to build up;  
A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
A time to get and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
A time to rend and a time to sew; a time to keep silence and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate;  
A time for war, and a time for peace.  
He hath made every thing beautiful in his time"

This is a time to give thanks. Here at the end of this service, in the quietness of these moments, let each in his own way and words, give thanks to God. Let us pray. .... pause.....Amen