

Sermon 1 – Transcript Thanksliving 2018

My friends, as always, I speak to you in the name of the one who is our hope and salvation, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

A usual practice for many churches when you get into this stage of the autumn is to move our attention to thinking about stewardship. Usually when you mention that word, everybody's ears go 'Shoop' and they stop listening. Because we think stewardship is about "oh, it's the money pitch". Well, that's part of it, because we measure so much in our lives with money. But it's actually about being disciples. It's about who we are, how we live, why we are and what we will be. It's about our talents, our treasures, everything that we have and knowing that it all comes from God.

So, we were thinking about what we're going to do with it this season, we decided we're going to go from this Sunday of Thanksgiving, Harvest Thanksgiving, Secular Thanksgiving, until All Saints, which is November 4th. Otherwise known as the festival of soup and buns lunch, which I know is very important. For those 4 or 5 Sundays, we're going to center our attention on moving from Thanksgiving into ThanksLiving. I think there's a profound difference. So, as we played with this concept, we've come up with some ideas. You're going to see some things unfold over the next few weeks. We're going to explore what ThanksLiving might mean. You have an insert. I don't want you to read it right now, but you can read about it, the thoughts about ThanksLiving, St. George's In Deed 2018. That going to be it. We're going to have some ways of hearing from some of you. We're starting next week. We're going to have a loop on our new smart TV, big screen at the back, flat screen that will have things going. Drink coffee at another times. You'll see comments from people. You'll see images. You'll see thoughts. You'll see things that help to undergird what we're going to be talking about in these next few weeks. That should also be available on the website.

But today I want to just introduce this difference. Thanksgiving, ThanksLiving. The difference one letter makes. Thanksgiving is more of a passive thing for me. Thanksgiving is when we say thanks. We've got all this stuff. Thank you. We don't do enough of that. We spend a lot of time accumulating things, but we don't spend a lot of time stepping back and saying thanks. I think ThanksLiving takes us into the stage 'so what do we do with this? How do we live with this? How do we be with this?' Thanksgiving is 'thank you!' But ThanksLiving is because of you, I'm motivated to do. I'm motivated to be. I'm motivated to become. It starts for us with that covenant of God's love. God's unconditional love, where God says 'I choose you and I ask that you choose me.'

That brings us into the covenant of all being and all sustenance. It's what the gospel text is about. We'll visit that again in a moment; about why do you worry.

So, for me, living thankfully is ThankLiving. Living as people who know their blessings, who can even in times of distress find something to sing about. I'm afraid this might sound a little irreverent, but I was thinking about this last week, I couldn't get the scene from Monty Python's *Life of Brian* out of my head, where Brian's on the cross and he starts to sing 'Always look on the bright side of life'. But there is a choice.

So, what do I mean by ThanksLiving? I learned something and I've said it to you before. You're going to hear things go around again now I'm in my tenth year with you. Some stories will back pop up again. But when I used to do street youth ministry St. James' in Vancouver, I learned something about the youth that lived on the street. Most people ignored them, and they always try and scam me for a few bucks. They knew who I was. I wouldn't do that. I'd tell them 'I know where you can go get food. I know where you can go get a place to be safe. And I know where you can go get resources to get set up. You know that in Vancouver, you can get eleven meals a day, if you want them. So, tell me what you really need.' You know what they told me? They said 'we need more people like you, because what you do is you sit down on the curb like this and you look us in the eyes.' Have you ever looked somebody in the eyes? I'm not picking on you. You just were brave enough to sit in the front row. I can do your dad. How about that? Maybe I'll go there. But you look somebody in the eyes, and if you know their name, you're a friend. Right? That's what they used to tell me. 'What you do is you sit down with us, you look us in the eyes and you say you're a real person.'

Now I'm not a Saint. I make so many mistakes, but there's something that they taught me about that I was reminded about last night at the community supper. I have a great job when I go to those, because my job is to say a prayer beforehand and give thanks and stand at the door welcoming the guests as they come in. I don't know them as well as Bobby, who works up there. He's really helpful as I've learned that James is pretty helpful if a fight breaks out too, which we had. But all sorts of things happen in humanity. But I get to greet people and I say 'happy Thanksgiving. Welcome here.' I get to talk to them as they go. 'Are you well fed, do you feel good?' They all say 'Yeah, St. George's always gives such good food. It's great. I feel great.' This is people who have nothing to feel good about. Or do they? Maybe we give a little ThankLiving love when we do stuff like that.

So, one guy came in, very articulate man. He was at least 2.5 if not the full 3 or 4 sheets to the wind, if you know what I mean. We got to talk a little about Scotland for some strange reason. I was just there in the spring and we talked a little bit. Then I realized, he didn't want food, he wanted to talk. So, we were talking for about 10 minutes. Then he finally said, 'what's this Thanksgiving thing?' I said, 'well it's probably different for everybody. Don't you think?' I said, 'Everybody has something to be thankful for. Sometimes it's hard to find, but my story of Thanksgiving won't be the same as yours.' 'But I want to know a story of Thanksgiving.' So, I told him a story or two.

Then I said but you know what I'm going to be talking about tomorrow? It's going to be a little bit different. I'm going to shift it up from Thanksgiving to ThanksLiving. And that opened up a world of conversation with him, because he said 'that makes sense for me.' ThanksLiving is about meeting people as real people. Engaging people as real people. Engaging this world as a gift from God. We spend most of our time trying to dominate this world. We do it in agriculture, we do it in all of the things we can do it. We live in a remarkable time of the technologies and the abilities we have. But all of that means we dominate God's creation and we dominate God. So, there's no real room for God anymore. It's all about us and what we can get and what we can amass. We don't live thankfully. We don't live humbly. We don't live with God.

So, he said and I don't know where this came from, but again it was one of those moments. He said 'do you know that phrase mind over matter?' I said 'yeah, we usually teach that to people that you can get past a problem if you just put your mind to it.' Mind over matter. He said 'there's another way to think about that.' And I've heard it before, but not for a long time. This was great to hear, because it was that same community that I've had other places to work in. He said 'I usually think about it if you don't mind, it doesn't matter.' And that speaks precisely to our gospel today. It was a gift from God for me. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter. That's what Jesus is saying. What are you worrying about? You're worrying about your investments, you're worrying about your housing, you're worrying about your job, you're worrying about your clothes, you're worrying about your looks, you're worrying about everything. Can you make anything in your life happen by worrying? No. The only thing you'll get from worrying is distress and isolation and brokenness. And you'll be consumed by the matter.

Think about it. If we step back, if we stop worrying, then those things stop mattering and we can put ourselves where we really need to be, which is living in ThanksLiving. Which takes us to others beyond ourselves. So, because God has given me something, I can take that something and live it

into the world. But we have to be able to be humble. We have to be able to accept our circumstances and where we are. Not as penalties but as graces in and of themselves.

This week we we're thinking about Saint Francis on Thursday, because it was Saint Francis Day. We're thinking about his teachings on the subject. The way he threw away all wealth to follow a life of poverty. I'm not suggesting you do that, but if you want to in this season of stewardship, I know the church would be happy to take your wealth. Which is one of the ironies, because the Franciscan world became quite wealthy with its houses. But his thing was about living with God and in that mendicant style moving with God, but also being humble to your circumstances. So, he was writing about joy. What does joy mean? He called one of the brothers. He's at Saint Mary and then the blessed Francis called brother Leo and said 'Brother Leo, right?' And Leo answered 'I'm ready'. Francis said 'right, what is true joy?' And then he said these examples.

A messenger comes and says that all the masters in Paris have come into our order. Right. This is not true joy. Or that all the prelates beyond the mountains have entered the order as well as the archbishops and some bishops. Or that the king of France and the king of England have entered our order. Right. This is not true joy. Again, that my brothers have gone to the non-believers and converted them all to the faith. Again, that I have so much grace from God that I healed the sick and perform many miracles. I tell you, joy does not consist in any of these things. What then is true joy? Then Francis tells a story on himself. It's important to know our humility and own imperfections. This is the story he tells.

I returned from Perugia and arrive here in the dead of night. It is wintertime, muddy and so cold that icicles have formed on the edge of my habit and keeps striking my legs and blood flows from such wounds. Having growing up in Saskatchewan, I feel that. All covered with mud and cold, I come to the gate. After I've knocked and called for some time, a Brother comes and asks 'who are you?' I answer 'Brother Francis'. He says 'Go away, this is not a proper hour for going about. You may not come in.' When I insist, he answers 'go away, you are a simple and stupid person. We are so many and we have no need of you. You are certainly not coming to us at this hour.' And I stand again at the door and say 'for the love of God, take me in tonight.' He answers 'I will not. Go to the Crosiers place and ask there'. 'I tell you this', says Francis, 'if I had patience and did not become upset, then there would have been true joy in this and true virtue and true salvation of the soul.'

We demand for ourselves when sometimes ThanksLiving begins by being thankful right where we are. There're all sorts of issues in here. The doors of hospitality should have been open to him. The

church was wrong to say we don't need you as we're wrong to say that to anyone, and we do that in so many ways. But the important thing is, a person of faith to say 'I'm never alone, I'm with God. In this circumstance, in this place, and even with the icicles cutting my leg and the cold in my body, I will embrace that. I will live ThanksLiving.'

We have much more to talk about, but I'll save that for the weeks to come.