



ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

Episcopal Church

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The Rev. Jerrold Thompson
Sermon for the Eve of Thanksgiving (R.C.L., Year B)
St. Mark's on the Campus
November 23, 2006

WE COME TOGETHER THIS EVENING to give thanks to God. It's what we do *every* time we celebrate the Eucharist, but tonight we do it with a twist, because we do it in conjunction with our national holiday of Thanksgiving, which the Episcopal Church also recognizes as a *church* holiday.

I rather like that fact, because it places the Thanksgiving holiday in the context of our relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Otherwise, it's all too easy to focus on turkey and dressing and pumpkin pie—or if you're like me, turkey and dressing and sweet potato pie, which I much prefer! Today I bought *three* different kinds of pie for tomorrow for three people! Whatever we plan on eating tomorrow, it's all too easy for us in 2006 to make Thanksgiving into a day of gluttony, especially given the indulgent consumption which is such a part of everyday life.

But by keeping Thanksgiving grounded in our relationship with Christ, we are reminded of what those first people who gathered to give thanks knew so intimately: that life comes at considerable cost, considerable giving up, considerable sacrifice—whether it be the cost

to those who sacrificed their lives to establish a new society, or the cost of sharing at a common table the crops for which they had worked so hard—or the cost to God that's involved with loving *us*. Sacrifices of God and of us all, sacrifices that bring greater life.

One gift of our readings for this evening is that they focus on more than just humanity in the relationship we have with God. “Look at the birds of the air . . . Consider the lilies of the field . . . if God so clothes the grass of the field”

I imagine most of us could relate stories of times when we have believed God to be intimately involved in our human lives, caring for us in ways we've been astounded by afterwards, times when like C. S. Lewis, we have been “surprised by joy”—and humbled by grace. Times for which we might be lifting our hearts in profoundest gratitude this evening.

Our gospel reminds us that the evidence of God's graciousness continually surrounds us on every side, if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear, if only we interpret the world in light of what we believe. “Look at the birds of the air. They don't gather their food into barns.” They don't hoard wealth, thinking that they can somehow insure their lives; they live each moment innately trusting in life.

I'm reminded of the Millennium Development Goals and the worldwide goal to cut poverty in half by the year 2015. Is not part of the answer the very simple sharing of the

world's wealth, rather than the hoarding of it—and distributing it not by the geography in which it is found but to all the world's people, wherever we might live, whatever our form of government, or whatever our religion?

The basic problem with world poverty is not that God hasn't given us enough; it's not a shortage of food. The problem is a shortage of loving intention to see that our brothers and sisters throughout the world are fed. And we who have so much for which to give thanks over the next twenty-four hours also have more than our share of responsibility to see that *all* God's children are fed as richly as *we* are, to give thanks “not only with our lips, but in our lives,” to use that wonderful phrase from The General Thanksgiving.

There's another prophetic dimension to our readings tonight, found in our passage from Joel:

“Do not fear, O Soil! . . .

Do not fear, you animals of the field! . . .

O Children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given you the early rains. . . . The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. . . . “

The picture Joel paints is one in which—because of *God*—the natural world and the human race live together jointly giving glory to God. Both are *fruitful* to the glory of God. Both exude the blessing of God. All are at peace with God and one another. The *entire* created order lives in a spirit of thanksgiving.

This feast Joel describes comes after a time of famine, after years when the swarming locust, the hopper, the destroyer, the cutter, have decimated the land. Joel then called on the people to fast and pray, and now their prayers have been answered, answered in unity with all of creation, which no longer has reason to fear.

As we humans live ever more deeply into the blessing of God, we do so united with all creation, not separated from it. We live as one with the rest of God's world, not against it. We live in communion with all with which God lives in communion. As I saw on a bumper sticker earlier today, "God bless the whole world; no exceptions!" In holy communion with God, we discover God's blessing in the lilies of the field that shine forth with God's glory, in the birds of the air that soar with God's majesty, and in breathing into ourselves pure, fresh air filled with God's Spirit and unpolluted by the imprint of grasping, gluttonous human spirits, the soul of humanity gone awry.

That communion is God's promise to us, God's gift to us; and although it remains unfulfilled, we can still give thanks for that goal toward which God is bringing this world—steadily, surely, and with the cooperation of those who are seeking first God's reign, and trusting that in doing so, all that we truly need will come our way as well. Amen.