

Thanksgiving

It's been a while, I know, and I hope to pick up the bi-weekly schedule in two weeks. For now, however, let me offer this updated reprint of an ET&N originally published in 2003

Then

Among the terms used for the Lord's Supper or Communion is the Eucharist, which is still used in some "high" Christian groups such as Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Orthodox. The term comes from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which is translated gratitude, thankfulness, or thanksgiving. *Eucharist* is the term used most often by early church fathers such as Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus.

When Jesus instituted the *Eucharist*, He knew His betrayal, trial, scourging, and crucifixion were only hours away—and He gave His disciples something to remember Him and comfort them. This comfort was offered not just to the 12 at the table that evening, but to all those who would be followers of Christ over the centuries. The New Testament church celebrated *eucharistia* at least weekly as part of a communal meal.

Jesus used two equally powerful symbols:

Bread, the symbol of His body, is an external sustainer of life. The Greek word for bread or loaf, *artos* (ar'tos), is used 97 times in NT).

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul writes "*Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ. Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of one loaf.*"

The apostle John quotes our Lord as saying, "*For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world. I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger...*"

At the Lord's Supper, Matthew writes, "*And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.'*"

In 1st Corinthians, Paul writes, "*Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.*"

The taking of bread is therefore a self-sustaining participation not only in the body of Christ, but also in the work of the church. Bread gives life, the loaf is Christ's body, and the church is His body alive today.

In chapter 26, Matthew writes, "*And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.'*" (Matthew 26:27-28)

Blood is the internal sustainer of life, and represents forgiveness.

Interestingly, the Greek word for blood, *haima* (haa' ee- mah) like artos (bread), appears 97 times in the NT. I don't believe in coincidences.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ?"*

So each week, we drink in God's forgiveness, reminding us of the continual cleansing He has given us. Blood is the symbol of God's covenant throughout the Old Testament, and the writer of the book of Hebrews explained the transfer of the sacrificial system to the universal sacrifice of Jesus.

"And according to the Law," he wrote, "one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

Under the covenant of Abraham, no one could enter the Holy Place—that portion of the Temple when God was said to reside and the Ark of the Covenant was placed. One of my favorite passages in the Bible is Hebrews 10:19-23, but it becomes even more powerful when it becomes personal by replacing the we's with I's. Listen to what the blood of Jesus did for each of us individually:

Hebrews 10: 19-23 *"Since therefore, brethren, I have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for me through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since I have a great priest over the house of God, let me draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having my heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and my body washed with pure water. Let me hold fast the confession of my hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."*

Because of the bread of life, we never hunger, and as John writes, *"'he who believes in Me,' Jesus said, 'shall never thirst.'"*

Forgiveness and entrance into the holy place come to each of us individually through the grace of our Lord. Now that's a real reason for Thanksgiving!

Now

We have been members of four different congregations since my wife and I were baptized in 1986. In 1997, we left the North Atlanta church of Christ, where we had been members for seven years, to move to Colorado. We left behind deep and meaningful relationships that we knew would be difficult to replace. One of the immediately bonding experiences in our new congregation at the Evergreen Community church of Christ was sharing the bread and the fruit of the vine with our new brothers and sisters.

No matter where any of us go, this is one of the things that truly binds Christians together—celebrating the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord through communion. I think churches that forego weekly observance miss an important opportunity to reinforce our commonality in Christ. For Christians, every Sunday is Thanksgiving Day!

In American history, there were a number of Thanksgiving proclamations prior to the establishment of the official holiday. It is appropriate to reproduce three of these to demonstrate the intimate connection between the Thanksgiving holiday and faith in America. The first was on June 20, 1676:

"The Holy God having by a long and Continual Series of his Afflictive dispensations in and by the present Warr with the Heathen Natives of this land, written and brought to pass bitter things against his own Covenant people in this wilderness, yet so that we evidently discern that in the midst of his judgements he hath remembered mercy, having remembered his Footstool in the day of his sore displeasure against us for our sins, with many singular Intimations of his Fatherly Compassion, and regard; reserving many of our Towns from Desolation Threatened, and attempted by the Enemy, and giving us especially of late with many of our Confederates many signal Advantages against them, without such Disadvantage to ourselves as formerly we have been sensible of, if it be the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, It certainly bespeaks our positive Thankfulness, when our Enemies are in any measure disappointed or destroyed; and fearing the Lord should take notice under so many Intimations of his returning mercy, we should be found an Insensible people, as not standing before Him with Thanksgiving, as well as lading him with our Complaints in the time of pressing Afflictions:

The Council has thought meet to appoint and set apart the 29th day of this instant June, as a day of Solemn Thanksgiving and praise to God for such his Goodness and Favour, many Particulars of which mercy might be Instanced, but we doubt not those who are sensible of God's Afflictions, have been as diligent to espy him returning to us; and that the Lord may behold us as a People offering Praise and thereby glorifying Him; the Council doth commend it to the Respective Ministers, Elders and people of this Jurisdiction; Solemnly and seriously to keep the same Beseeking that being perswaded by the mercies of God we may all, even this whole people offer up our bodies and soulds as a living and acceptable Service unto God by Jesus Christ."

The second was issue by George Washington in 1789:

"WHEREAS it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favour; and Whereas both Houfes of Congress have, by their joint committee, requefted me "to recommend to the people of the United States a DAY OF PUBLICK THANSGIVING and PRAYER, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to eftablifh a form of government for their safety and happiness:"

NOW THEREFORE, I do recommend and affign THURSDAY, the TWENTY-SIXTH DAY of NOVEMBER next, to be devoted by the people of thefe States to the fervice of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our fincere and humble thanksfor His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the fignal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpofitions of His providence in the courfe and conclufion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have fince enjoyed; -- for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enable to eftablifh Conftitutions of government for our fafety and happinefs, and particularly the national one now lately instituted; -- for the civil and religious liberty with which we are bleffed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffufing useful knowledge; -- and, in general, for all the great and various favours which He has been pleafed to confer upon us.

And also, that we may then unite in moft humbly offering our prayers and fupplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and befeech Him to pardon our

national and other transgressions; -- to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our federal and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all foreigners and nations (especially such as have shown kindness unto us); and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

Note: [click here](#) for a link to a copy of the original document.

The third comes from Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War:

"The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defence, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle, or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American People. 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 Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to his 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, tranquillity and Union."

In 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt signed the bill establishing Thanksgiving in the United States as the fourth Thursday of November. Despite the fact that the church celebrates Thanksgiving (*Eucharistia*) every Sunday and that thanksgiving to God should be a continuous attitude for Christians, I'm glad we have the official

Thanksgiving holiday. It is the one major holiday with religious significance that has escaped commercialism—few people send Thanksgiving cards, people don't exchange gifts, there is no real Thanksgiving personality (no Santa Claus or Easter Bunny). For many people, Thanksgiving is the favorite holiday because it is a time when people take a break, get together with family and loved ones, and really think about how blessed we are.

For our part, we'll be celebrating Thanksgiving dinner with good friends.

I hope each of you enjoys a wonderful Thanksgiving, full of new memories and profound gratitude to our Lord!



NEXT ISSUE: Why? (December 6)

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