

To Whom We Give Thanks

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November 22, 2020

Happy Thanksgiving! Thanksgiving? Happy? A little different this year. Different in a number of ways and yet a longing to be connected to loved ones and with gratitude. Different, so very mindful of a virus that can quickly turn or day into night, our gratitude into grief, we will not be traveling as we had hoped for. Dissimilar from past Thanksgivings our gatherings around table shall be much smaller in size, making us keenly aware of who isn't sitting next to us. And unlike the many succulent dishes of food that leave us saying to one another, "I'm stuffed. Just a small sliver of that pecan pie, please," we will have fewer dishes to clean.

It is and shall be a different kind of Thanksgiving this 400th year anniversary of the Pilgrims, known as the Separatists from a branch of the English Puritans, who landed on the shore of the Wampanoag Tribe on America's shoreline in an effort not to have their values and identity influenced by the free thinkers in Holland where they originally fled to. That's the story we learned in our schooling. But it is certainly far from the true story. Though Thanksgiving will be a different kind of day this year, and we are truly thankful that we will have food on our tables, no matter how small the gatherings, no matter how great the gratitude we also have opportunity this morning, this Thanksgiving, and maybe because it is so different for us this year, to own what is true about the day and in so doing what is true and at work in us.

This Thanksgiving calls us to empathize, to stand in solidarity with those for whom our national holiday is a very different kind of day. Always has been. For the indigenous people of this great land Thanksgiving is officially designated as a Day of Mourning.

Show: <https://youtu.be/6c1bQQOmFlw>.

Lakota Holder: "The truth is what keeps us human."

I want to share with you a conversation that I believe Lakota's admonition about the effect truth can have upon us. Back when....one evening my twin brother, Doug, and I got together to see a movie called, *Babett's Feast*, which actually won the Oscar for best foreign film of that year. As we sat in the theater, waiting for the film to begin, I shared with Doug a sermon I had read about St. Thomas being a twin. I enthusiastically told him about how legend had it that Thomas may very well have been the twin of Jesus. I went on to explain how it can be interpreted that Thomas and Jesus were like shadows to one another. Where Jesus was caught up in beauty, pain, and the unknown, Thomas was caught up in seeing the problems of life and trying to solve them. Where Jesus lived mystery and faith, Thomas lived doubt and fear. Being twins is like that I said.

Seeing that I had come to that conclusion, feeling rather proud of being able to enlighten my brother, Doug simply stared at me, smiled, and then in playful accusation replied, "So, what does that make you, Jesus? Luckily, that when the film began, I believe.

Babett's Feast takes place in a small Swedish village with twelve elderly folks seated around the table. They are gathered to celebrate the birthday of the founder of their religious sect. They had greatly loved and respected their pastor, the one who had formed them into a cohesive and loving group. But since their minister had died, and the years passed, and they grew ever older, little resentments began to build. How they had cheated one another in business or the secrets they held about each other. As they gather to pay homage to their departed leader, one wonders if this meal will not be their last as a group for all the estrangement that has grown up between them. Their religion had all the right words and outward appearances of right belief, the proper piety, but the soul of their faith was flickering dim.

As the evening progresses and one course after another of sumptuous food and wine is served to them a transformation begins to envelop the dinner party. The wine probably didn't hurt any. Smiles begin to break out upon their faces. Harbored transgressions are made into jokes. And disputes fall into silence. At long last one amongst them stands up and quotes words that were once spoken by the one in whose memory they have gathered, their founding minister. They are words that bring back to their minds a time when they were younger, idealistic, and when love truly reigned amongst them. "One day," he had said, "Mercy and Truth shall meet. Justice and Peace shall kiss one another."

Doug and I shared more than a few tears in the darkness of that theater. The movie is a portrayal of religion at its best. Where beliefs about one another, about what constitutes a caring for each other, are set aside so that mercy and truth can meet, when justice and peace kiss one another.

Alan Jones, author and theologian, whom you have heard me quote from before, writes, "Of particular concern is the attitude to belief that insists that not one stuffed owl, not one clung to belief, be lost. This sad and disturbing way of believing cause a deep and tragic split in one's mind, a split between what it knows to be the truth and the object of belief. When these two coincide, all is well; but when the truth begins to be at variance with belief, a pattern of self-deception and lying begins to emerge." "But the way of believing that I espouse," he writes, "would always choose the truth, even if one's perception of it turned out to be wrong and allow the false object of faith to dissolve. I do not pretend that this is easy, but I can bear

witness to the fact that when I have made the choice, a fresh and living faith (my words) appears. There is an epiphany.”

If only our current president could make such choices.

In Lakota Holder’s words, “The truth is what keeps us human.”

Of particular concern, that I propose to you this morning, are those beliefs held about Thanksgiving that cause a deep and tragic split in America’s mind, its collective psyche, its collective consciousness if you will, between what we know to be true of the day and what is held in belief about it, that the Pilgrims came to these shores as benevolent caretakers, whom tribes like the Wampanoag, were grateful for their presence, knowledge, and religion. Such beliefs are perched like stuffed owls, flying Trump flags on the beds of pick-up trucks, clung to so that we are lulled into feelings of goodness, pride, and contentment as assuredly as the Tryptophan effects our bodies after we’ve eaten the last bite of turkey for the day.

Choosing for what is true, though hurtful, at times devastating impact, the day holds for indigenous people calls us to an bring even greater meaning, a fresher understanding, an epiphany, of what it means to be human, to share in our humanity, seeking where mercy and truth meet and peace/justice kiss the pain and plight of Native Americans, and if with them, then also the very people who labor in the fields so that we may have food on our tables this coming Thursday.

Last Monday Harriet, Sally, Maria, and I, through your generosity, loaded our trunks up with rice and beans. We drove to Plant City where fields and fields of strawberries will be ready for harvesting in a couple of months. But until harvest time comes the migrant workers, faces similar to those of children locked up at in cages at the border, have little to no income. Their basic staples of food are in want. And so, meeting up with one another at the McDonalds located at Exit 14 on I-4 we drove to four labor camps owned by Parksdale, Favorite Farms and 3 Stars.

Show video “To Whom We Give Thanks”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1HSxjyv4Eg&authuser=1>

That there is a place where truth and mercy meet, peace/justice kiss. However, it is not the only place where they meet. They come together around our tables this Thursday if we allow them to, and we speak of the true Thanksgiving to one another, along with the things we name for which we are grateful. And finally, they meet here, among us, in this hour as we lay claim to truth that makes us human.