

**McCabe United Methodist Church**

**November 22, 2009**

“Blessed to be a Blessing!”

Matthew 6:25-33 & Mark 5:18-20

Pastor Art Scanson

An American and British journalist were discussing Thanksgiving on a British radio program. The American asked if Thanksgiving was celebrated in the United Kingdom. “Yes,” the British journalist replied, “but we celebrate it on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September.”

“Why then?” asked the American.

“That’s when you chaps left,” the Brit answered jokingly.

For us in the US, Thanksgiving is usually traced to 1621 when a Pilgrim leader, William Bradford, proclaimed a day of feasting to commemorate the first harvest after a long year of suffering. What you may not know is that, as the colonies grew more prosperous, the people forgot all about Thanksgiving and the meaning it held for their ancestors. For generations Thanksgiving was celebrated sporadically, if at all, with no set date.

Then in 1822 Sarah Hale, a young widow from New Hampshire, dedicated herself to revive this important celebration. Sarah, a mother of five children and an editor of a women’s magazine, began a 40-year campaign of writing editorials and letters to governors and presidents to get Thanksgiving officially recognized as a national holiday. Three Presidents turned her down. Her obsession became a reality, eventually (242 years later). In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday of November as an annual celebration of Thanksgiving.

Sarah Hale is not remembered for this act, but rather she is better known as the author of a poem - “Mary had a little lamb, Its fleece was white as snow. . .” And as the late Paul Harvey would say, “Now you know the rest of the story. . .”

First let me mention that there is **something healthy about giving thanks**. Please note - I didn’t say there is something healthy about Thanksgiving meals. Yes, most of us will overindulge, as is our custom on Thanksgiving.

There is the story Helen Hayes would tell on herself. As she retired to the kitchen to put the finishing touches on the Thanksgiving dinner she was preparing, she would warn her family: “This is the first turkey I’ve ever cooked. If it isn’t right, I don’t want anyone to say a word. We’ll just get up from the table, without comment, and go down to the hotel for dinner.”

When she returned some ten minutes later she found the family seated expectantly at the dinner table—wearing their coats and hats.

The danger is not that the meal won’t be tasty. The danger is that we will consume too much. Which may not be too healthy for us, BUT the act of giving thanks is one of the most spiritually beneficial things we can do! Unfortunately, who of us really pause for as much a few moments to give thanks? More than a prayer offered by someone?

Another thing giving thanks reminds us of **how blessed we are**. Someone has written:

If you woke up this morning and were able to hear the birds sing, use your vocal cords to utter human sounds, walk to the breakfast table on two good legs, and read the newspaper with

two good eyes. . .you are more blessed than millions of those who could not do these things.

If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death. . .you are more blessed than three billion people in the world.

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep. . .you are richer than 75% of this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish some place. . .you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If you are over thirty and either of your parents is still alive you are very rare. Over a billion people are orphans by then.

If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful. . .you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.

To give thanks is to remind us how blessed we are. This is not to say that you and I do not have our problems. But, for most of us, our blessings far outweigh our burdens.

Let's turn to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount - Matthew 6:25-33.

Isn't it interesting that we find it easier to fixate on our burdens and overlook our blessings. We say we are a people of faith, while so much of our life is lived not by faith, but by fear. May we remember, giving thanks reminds us of how blessed we are.

Also, giving thanks reminds us of the **source of our blessings**. Giving thanks reminds us of how much God loves each of us.

Phyllis Wohlfarth's husband gave her a gold lapel pin for Christmas. She remembered how it only took a second for her to thank her husband for the gift. It wasn't until a week later, as she put on the lapel pin to wear to an event, she reflected on her husband's thoughtfulness. With more sincerity, she thanked him again. It was then that her husband explained that the pin had belonged to his grandmother, so it was very special to him. Phyllis noted that if she hadn't offered the second "thank you," she might have never known the significance of the pin. It was only when she took the time to reflect on the gift and offered a more sincere "thank you" that she really learned to appreciate her husband's gesture. Which is to say, when we start counting our blessings, we are reminded just how good God has been to you. After all, these blessings don't just happen. There is a Source of everything we have - God is that Source! Our lives didn't just happen. There is a creator God who gave us every wondrous gift. When we give thanks we are reminded of the source of everything we have.

One last thing. When we give thanks we are reminded **to share with others what the Lord has done for us**. Let's turn now to Mark's Gospel - Mark 5:18-20.

If you and I are truly thankful for the blessings God has bestowed upon you and me, then we have a story to share with others. And of course, the best way to share the story is to share the blessings.

You and I have been so blessed. We need Thanksgiving to remind us of those blessings and to remind us of the source of those blessings. Now let us go out, as Jesus told the man healed in Mark's Gospel, to tell others, and to show others, "how much the Lord has done for [us]." That's the way we can keep Thanksgiving all year long. May it be so!