

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Pass the Olives, Please !

Based on Deuteronomy 8:6-18

I remember the first time we took the kids to "Golden Corral Restaurant." They looked at me and then back at the long buffet of food, and that was the last I saw of them. Anything you could possibly imagine was to be found on the rows of chafing dishes: make your own salads, steak, chicken, chicken steak, (which is a whole different thing in the United States), casseroles, pizza, pasta, steamed vegetables, mashed potatoes, French fried potatoes, scalloped potatoes, baked potatoes, shrimp, fish, crab, sauces, dressings, olives (please don't forget the olives!) Then of course, there was dessert: jello, puddings, cakes, cookies and squares, ice cream and toppings, sprinkles, different sprinkles, gluten free brownies, fresh fruit, and wait for it, the chocolate fountain! So many choices! Dessert first, or be civilized and start with a salad. The possibilities were endless and the staff just kept coming to take your dirty plate so there was room for a clean one.

I decided to stray from our story of Moses, so that we might pause on this Thanksgiving Weekend, and think about the word 'Thanksgiving.' But the Thanksgiving Scriptures brought us right back to our story, just a little further down the line. So, will I spare you the drama of the

golden calf and Moses' temper tantrum when he discovered the shining idol in the center of camp upon his return from receiving the Ten Commandments. I will spare you the battles along the way. I will spare you the daily trials that come with leading thousands of people through a hot desert, while life and death, by its very nature, continued as well.

The journey was nearing its end, and the Promised Land could be seen or almost seen as a small smudge on the distant horizon. Moses, now an old man, hardened by the trials of leadership, skin worn and leathery from the sun, reminded the people of all the bounty that was to be theirs in this new land, and all the opportunities that would be theirs for the taking: *For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. (v7-9)*

"But, before you get too excited," Moses continued, *"Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you*

eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (v11-14)

If it sounds to you like this passage from Deuteronomy is a long-winded version of the commandments, once again, then you would be leaning in the right direction. As the journey was nearing its conclusion, and as Moses' health began to decline, his messages were to remind the people of the conditions, the 'Terms of Reference' if you will, of what this whole journey had been about: the promises YHWH made, and the faithfulness and trust the people were to live by.

But why did Moses feel the need to repeat all this, yet again? He did so, because the people waiting to move into the Promised Land were not the same people who had crossed the Red Sea so many years before. They were the children or possibly the grandchildren of those men and women who had lived in slavery. The people before Moses now, had never seen Egypt, or Mount Saini, or likely, the golden calf. They had been born in a tent in the desert, a nameless face in a nomadic camp. They travelled. They

battled when required. They listened to fairy tale like stories about a Promised Land where life would be easy, and wonderful.

Yes! This generation who stood before Moses did need to hear the stories. Because it is likely that this was the first time that their ears may have heard it. It was a story told, over again, because Moses knew from personal experience, what people were like, when left to their own devices:

Some grew proud.
Some grew arrogant.
Many grew forgetful
about what had been
accomplished so far.
Many no longer gave
time to consider the
sacrifices along the way.
Most ignored YHWH.

It is our custom to offer a blessing, before we eat the food prepared. But you will notice that our lesson today, suggests offering thanks, after the meal instead:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. (v10).

An interesting spin on things. When the food is hot, and the children are quiet and everyone is hungry, we quickly say a few words, so we can get on with the food before the turkey goes dry and the gravy boils over in the kitchen. But after the meal, when tummies are satisfied, and the olive dish is empty, and the children are off playing in the basement, and the wine glasses or coffee cups are filled over dessert, there is a calmness which settles over the table, an almost imperceptible hush that

falls upon us, as we finish the last few nibbles, chat quietly, laugh, or sit back in our chair and listen. These are the sounds of family. These are the sounds of satisfaction. These are the sounds of contentment. This is the moment when you can feel and hear God in the room. This is the moment of thanksgiving.

For in that room, there is the story of you, and those you care for. This year, they may be with you in person, or in pictures on the wall, or on your iPad, or in your memories, but they are with you. They are part of the story of you, and how it is that you came to be here, today. Here is the place to reminisce, to laugh and yes to cry, for meals gone awry, for family drama over the years, for holy moments discovered in unexpected places. In this room there is history. In this room there is tradition and ritual. And in this room, there is the promise of tomorrow.

So, this Thanksgiving weekend, I invite you to take the opportunity to pause, and give thanks. Yes, for the turkey and trimmings. Yes, for the many blessings you have received during these strange months' past. But you've heard this all before.

When you are 'full and satisfied', sit back, close your eyes. Think back. Think upon family events. Think upon those important moments and decisions you've made over the years. Think about the journey that has brought you to where you are today, to be the person you are today. Breathe deeply, and recognize, God has brought you to this very moment where you are now, 'full and satisfied.' Now,

without opening your eyes, turn your head the other direction, and try to imagine what might be out there yet to come: a place of milk and honey, pomegranates and sunshine. What does your Promised Land look like? Who is to say what might or might not yet be?

This is you, giving thanks, to The One who gave you life.

This is you, giving thanks, to The One who has stood by you when others did not.

This is you, giving thanks, to The One who understood the feelings you had, the reasons why you did things the way that you did.

This is you, giving thanks, for a life, far richer than you could have imagined, more challenging than you could have known, more worthwhile than you realize.

This is you, giving thanks, for a life not yet finished; with a place in the Promised Land that is yet unclear, but certain.

So,
Eat as much turkey as is offered.
Share the olives, if you must.
Count your blessings.
Then, when you are 'full and satisfied,' give *thanks*.
Amen.