

“TBTG”

As a child our family Thanksgivings were not the large family gathering of a Norman Rockwell painting or a Hallmark Channel TV special. I am not sure why that was since my grandparents on both sides lived within a few miles of us. Other extended family members lived close by as well. It was not until years after my grandparents had died and my siblings and cousins were all adults that we started to spend Thanksgiving as an extended family. At that point I came to understand the dynamics that characterized the stereotypical Thanksgiving meal—crazy uncles spouting inappropriate thoughts, overeating, women doing all of the work while the men and then lazed in front of the TV watching football games they did not care about, and trying to make small talk with people I saw only once a year.

I do not know why people are so anxious about not having those gatherings this year. I would think it would be a relief. This type of event seems more like a chore than something to look forward to and give thanks for.

Thanksgiving started out as a celebration of a good harvest. People gave thanks to God for the bounty that insured life would last through the winter. There was a cornucopia of vegetables and fruits that would be stored or canned for the winter. There was a bit of excess to eat because some foods would not last being too ripe or too fragile for storage. Supermarkets that supply food, especially out of season food, year round did not exist. In the past people relied on what they grew and they grew foods that would keep.

Thanksgiving celebrations were tied to the land and the bounty it provided. People knew that there was much more than hard work and ingenuity that provided a good harvest. Weather, insects, disease, and availability of water were out of human hands and in the hands of another. To give thanks to God came from an understanding that it is God who provides.

The stereotypical modern Thanksgiving Day feast is a profound statement of self-sufficiency. We are saying to ourselves that we do not need anyone—our community, our family, our God—we have it all well in hand thank you very much. The gifts of God including life, bounty, and hope do not enter into our thinking. Yet when challenges arise as they have this year, like Biblical plagues, we are bereft. We flounder in uncertainty not knowing which way to turn; people lose their jobs, their security, and even their lives. This unique and challenging year ought to, if we are humble, bring us back to the sense that our faith in God is all that is true and abiding.

This Thanksgiving Day I urge you to be like the Americans who celebrated the first day of national thanksgiving in November of 1863. They were in the midst of a war that threatened to end the American Experiment. It was a war in which the outcome was still uncertain. It did not appear that there was much to be thankful for in the midst of so much death and destruction, but they gave thanks that God had given them lives, hearts, and souls to dedicate to the cause of freedom for all people. Let us, in the same way, give thanks for our lives and for the healthcare workers who, like the soldiers at Gettysburg, are too often giving the “last full measure of devotion.” Let us give thanks to the Lord and rededicate ourselves as God said to remnant of Israel, “do justice, and love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”