

November 18, 2007
Isaiah 65:17-25
Luke 21:1-4

Thanks a Lot

Every year Emma makes the pies for our Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. She inherited the baking gene from Bill's mom. Emma has the golden touch. And she LOVES to bake. She does the pumpkin pies with the little fall leaf cut outs that go around the edge of the crust brushed with egg whites and baked to a perfect brown. Last year she was not in town so I assigned my brother's family to bring the pies. Mike loves to cook and is a good cook, but he had never made pie before (no baking genes on our side of the family, trust me), so Michael and the twins got out the cookbook – the serious Joy of Cooking cookbook – and opened to pies. Irma Rombauer always includes the whole culture and history of food in her cookbooks; and my brother, the teacher, willingly reads along, and, having learned this, shared with us that pie used to be an American staple. Most women baked 12-14 pies a week for their families who ate it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. While pie nowadays seems like a luxury item, a treat, “back in the day” it was a very humble dish.

Thus the phrase “as humble as apple pie,”

Mike and the twins and Emma are splitting pie duty this year since Emma is back in the area.

Actually, humble is a good word for this moment in the year. We are poised on the brink of the old and the New Year according to the church calendar. “Ordinary time” ends in thanksgiving which then leads to the new year beginning with the season of Advent, the season of waiting with open heart for the rebirth of God's grace anew in our lives and in our world.

The Thanksgiving meal has its own history – and several versions – but it was declared official as a Day of Thanksgiving in order for the citizens of this nation not to overindulge in stuffing and football, but as a day for humble awareness of how blessed we are and how little we have done to “earn” any of it. That we are alive; that we in the Northwest this year are not the victims of natural disasters, that we were born in a nation rich beyond measure and free in ways others can only dream; that we have abundant clean water at our disposal and can access heat at our fingertips as if by magic, that we can come to our choice of church/synagogue/temple/mosque/meetinghouse if we wish – or not; that we were given public educations we didn't pay for ourselves; that we are free to choose our own vocations; that when my son had scarlet fever – twice – he was practically instantly cured by a simple, cheap medication that wasn't even available when my parents were children; the talents we inherit; the accidents I survived and avoided including all the ones I don't even know about – all the “there but for the grace of God's” in my life and the lives of loved ones. This unspeakably, exquisitely beautiful world we live in; the music of the spheres; art and literature we simply inherit as citizens of this

world...the art and architecture I saw in Paris alone last year enough to fill my heart a million times over; the books I have read that have changed my life – the Gospel of Luke, Les Miserables, The Secret Garden, The Grapes of Wrath, the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Rumi, Vivaldi's "Four Seasons"; Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring", Paul McCartney's "Blackbird" and "I Will" and so much more, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Duke Ellington, Edith Piaf....All of it pure gift.

And most of all for grace. God's grace which is ours not because of anything we have done or not done. Just ours. A birthright as God's beloved. God's love, compassion and energy at work in your life and in the world simply because it is God's desire that we have an abundantly blessed existence. Forgiveness ours for the asking. Mercy ours simply because it is God's desire that we experience mercy, because it is God's nature to be merciful.

I have said so many times in the last 29 years from this pulpit that God's grace saved my life. I am not sure how I would have survived my curse, my affliction of extreme life-destroying perfectionism if God had not come and taken it from me. I know without a doubt that I would not be here today the person I am, standing with you in this place, if not for God's presence, God's leading, and even God's intervention at times.

Gratitude always leads me to humility. When I think of the loving, faithful parents God gave me, my sisters and brother who have been there through thick and thin, even the sister who didn't speak to me for 20 years (and who has miraculously forgiven me somehow for some reason beyond my doing anything) would have done anything I needed there to do if it had come to that; the friends who have held my hand and walked with me when I was scared to death - sometimes for myself or for other loved ones and especially for my children at certain moments in their growing up years...

**We thank thee then, O Father,
For all things bright and good,
The seed time and the harvest,
Our life, our health, our food.
Accept the gifts we offer
For all thy love imparts,
And what thou most desirest,
Our humble, thankful hearts.**

There's a lot that can (and has) been said about the woman in our gospel passage today – the poor widow who finds herself completely dependent on others for her subsistent living but throws her two teeny coins and her fate wholeheartedly into God's coffers – trusting that God will see to her needs somehow even if she has no idea what that will be or mean – but willing to rely on God's grace and let that be enough.

We end one year then to begin the next humbly, gratefully aware of God's generosity to us and for all, for our whole universe. We step into the new year with hearts most tender and open and eager to receive anew the birth of Christ, the newly aware of God's love

and compassion and generosity at work in our hearts, our lives, our church, our world. And, in the dark peace of winter, we prepare ourselves to become ground for reseeded, for the roots of God's generosity to grow deeply in our souls so the branches can bear the fruit of that compassion even more sweet, more abundant in the coming year.

I know that it's hard to think of this next month as a season of quiet contemplation, of "silent nights" of patient or impatient waiting and prayer. More like noise, glitter, ho-ho-ho, to do lists, and baking and wrapping and racing with breakneck speed up and down the freeway to mall and party and recital and back to the mall (or, hopefully, Saturday Market.) So isn't it nice that we have this year that extra Sunday between Thanksgiving Thursday and the first Sunday in Advent to take a breath and take a few moments to be quiet and pray for God to come into our lives anew and make of us and our world the new creations Isaiah prophesies?

I end with the words to the third verse of the hymn we are about to sing, "For the Fruit of All Creation":

For the harvests of the spirit, thanks be to God;
For the good we all inherit, thanks be to God.
For the wonders that astound us,
For the truths which still confound us,
Most of all that love has found us,
Thanks be to God.