A.M.D.G. Thanksgiving Sunday – B Text: Matthew 6: 25-34

October 11th, 2015

*Matthew 6:25-33 The Message (MSG) 25-26“If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don’t fuss about what’s on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds. 27-29“Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. 30-33“If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don’t you think he’ll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving. People who don’t know God and the way God works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how God works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. And you'll find your everyday concerns will be met. Don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes. Just live one day at a time."*

**Looking At Life Differently**

Not to be outdone by Janet, I thought I would begin this morning with a Thanksgiving chuckle:

*Martha had a parrot called Brutus. Now the only problem with Brutus was that he swore and cussed something terrible.  Martha was having her in-laws over for Thanksgiving - so she decided to try to train Brutus quickly not to swear. Just before her Mother-in-law was due, Brutus cussed terribly, so Martha put him in the freezer for 2 minutes to literally cool off.  Then she opened the door and took out the parrot along with the turkey.*

*'And have you learned your lesson about cussing?' Martha asked the parrot.*

*Brutus the parrot took one look at the dead turkey and said: 'I sure have.  But I have one I have a question, "What did the turkey do?" '*

I had coffee with a colleague the other day, and we were reflecting a bit on Thanksgiving – bemoaning the fact that – in some ways – there seems to be a bit of hypocrisy about the way we celebrate. Like Christmas – on Thanksgiving, we focus so much attention on one day – making a point of being generous with giving to those less fortunate, gathering families together, and giving thanks to God. But what about the rest of the year? Having said that, however - Thanksgiving ***does*** play an important role for all of us. It calls us back to reflect on the things for which we are thankful – and it causes us to stop for a moment and look at life differently.

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Look at the letters **GODISNOWHERE** for a moment. What do you see? You can actually read the letters in two ways: *God is now here* OR *God is nowhere.* There’s a vast difference in meaning, isn’t there – depending on how you look at it!

Now let’s look at the next word ….. **RESPONSIBILITY** What comes to mind when we think of the word ‘responsibility’? Perhaps we think about credit or blame – and in: ‘*he or she is responsible’*. Or perhaps a sense of obligation comes to mind – as in: ‘*it’s your responsibility’*.

If I were to suggest to you a sentence that goes something like this: *“She is responsible for today’s Thanksgiving dinner* …” - you could take several meanings from that.

- she is a good cook;

- she is a bad cook;

- and of course – no matter how she cooks – it is her job or task to make sure that the turkey is ready and the pumpkin pie is made – and everything for the dinner is looked after.

But there is also another way of looking at the word **RESPONSIBILITY –** a way which is at the root of most thanksgiving feasts – from the Jewish feast of thanksgiving – Succoth – mentioned in the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures – to the thanksgiving feast we celebrate in Canada this weekend. Instead of a single word **RESPONSIBILITY** – let’s separate it into 2 words:

‘*response*’ and ‘*ability*’. In other words – an ability to respond with thanksgiving to life as it is given to us each day from the hand of God. What we are talking about goes beyond a one day celebration or feast – to an *attitude of faith*. Our ancestors in the faith – from Sarah to Mary, and from Abraham to Jesus – were all convinced that God is the source of everything. And that by graciously giving all things to us – God provides us with a ‘*response – ability’* - an ability to respond to God’s love and grace in a way that will show in our lives the abundance and wholeness God intends for us – and that God intends for our neighbours and our world.

Our scripture today from the gospel of Matthew points us to two things that help us to be able to develop this attitude of ‘*response-ability*’ or thanksgiving towards life – a matter of perspective, and the setting of priorities.

Often times – our response toward life depends on our perspective – how we choose to see things.

Take for example the man from Budapest, who goes to his rabbi and complains, *"Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?"*

The rabbi answers, "*Take your goat into the room with you*."  The man in incredulous, but the rabbi insists. "*Do as I say and come back in a week*."

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A week later the man comes back looking more distraught than before.  "*We cannot stand it," he tells the rabbi. "The goat is filthy."*

The rabbi then tells him, "*Go home and let the goat out. And come back in a week."*

A week later - the man returns to the rabbi, exclaiming, "*Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there's no goat -- only the nine of us."*

Developing an attitude of ‘response –ability’ and ‘thanksgiving’ toward life is a matter of perspective – of choosing the way we look at things. In today’s gospel reading – Jesus urges us to look at life from the perspective of one day at a time. In a wonderful paraphrase from Eugene Peterson’s ‘The Message’ version, we hear these words: *What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving. People who don’t know God and the way God works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how God works …… Don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes. Just live one day at a time."* Perspective – choosing the way we look at things.

But if our ‘response-ability’ as a faith-filled people calls us to look at life from a different perspective – and to choose to trust that God is working in our lives …. our ‘response-ability’ also calls us to set our priorities on those things that are really important. That’s what Jesus was talking about when he spoke of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field – and ended by saying: *“Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you as well.”*

Or as we hear it in the ‘Message’ paraphrase – “*Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. And you'll find your everyday concerns will also be met as well.”*

Our ‘response-ability’ - our ability to respond to life with thanksgiving - is all about perspective and priorities. And children are often the ones who remind us of this. In a 1992 edition of Redbook magazine, the comedic writer, Erma Bombeck told this story: *“An estimated 1.5 million people are living today after bouts with breast cancer. Every time I forget to feel grateful to be among them, I hear the voice of an eight-year-old named Christina, who had cancer of the nervous system. When asked what she wanted for her birthday, she thought long and hard and finally said, "I don't know. I have two sticker books and a Cabbage Patch doll. I have everything!"* And she concludes*, “You know - the kid is right.”*

And a similar voice of wisdom comes from a 12 year old boy named David was born without an immune system. He underwent a bone marrow transplant in order to correct the deficiency. Up to that point he had spent his entire life in a plastic bubble in order to prevent exposure to common germs, bacteria, and viruses that could kill him. He lived without ever knowing human contact. When asked what he'd like to do if and when released from his protective bubble, he replied, "*I want to walk barefoot on grass, and touch my mother's hand."*

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Jesus is reminding us this morning – as people of faith – that thanksgiving is our ‘*response-ability’* and depends on our perspective and priorities:

- looking at life differently and trusting in God who walks with us through our days – and in all the ups and downs of life;

– and in setting our priorities on what is important and what is not.

*Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. And you'll find your everyday concerns will be met. Don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. Just live one day at a time."*

May it be so. Amen