

## **November 25 Eve of Thanksgiving**

What a great day Thanksgiving is. Really looking forward to it.

We have not burdened the day with all of the trappings of Christmas.

No presents;

The traditions not so anxious;

A day of table fellowship; generous hospitality; refreshing and re-creational.

Thanksgiving also speaks to a most basic trait of a disciple of Jesus Christ: a thankful heart.

I know you have heard that before, but it is message that bears repeating.

I know it bears repeating because I myself so often feel that thankful feeling slipping away.

A long stretch of busy-ness sometimes leaves me with a sense of fatigue and over extension.

I am enough of an introvert to feel depleted after too many events, as perhaps churches often schedule in the fall.

I get my thankfulness back in quiet times; Advent will be good for my spiritual health, for the recovery of my thankful heart.

Tonight I'd name three movements of the soul that often lead us away from thankfulness.

They are Boredom, Perfectionism, and Anxiety. Perhaps some of the besetting sins of our age.

Let me begin with boredom.

We who have so much to be thankful for are often easily bored, bored even by our abundance.

The great measure of security that we enjoy in this nation is often lost on us as a great cause of thanksgiving.

Too often we view our daily routines as oppressive.

I treasure and know the important of routine with a small child. Such a joy to care for them.

And yet I confess there are evenings when I do not regret that a meeting has knocked me out of the bath, brush teeth, and books routine.

When we get bored with the great gifts of our lives, we may cast about for adventure and for relief from the relative ease and tedium of our lives.

And sometimes we do so in dangerous and destructive ways.

People get bored in good marriages and in good jobs and in good communities and instead of praying for the return of a thankful heart, make endless trouble for themselves.

If boredom and acting out are one betrayal of thankfulness, perfectionism is another.

I'll plead guilty here as well. How I regret the trite things that creep into my sermons; the under-prepared Sunday school classes; the forgotten details of liturgy; the pastoral call I failed to make.

I roast myself over the coals many a Sunday night, because, of course, I am perfect and should not make mistakes.

I don't really think I am perfect, of course. I am all too aware of my failures.

Even if I don't really think I am perfect, however, I act that way all too often.

I expect a few of you think you are perfect as well.

You work hard; try to think of everything; try to be considerate of others; and still everything does not quite turn out.

Instead of being thankful for the gifts God has given you; instead of giving

thanks for what you are able to do, you and I spend much time in that unthankful place of regret and self-recrimination.

Jesus reminded some of his questioners that no one is good but God alone; our hearts will be more thankful if we are in touch with our imperfection and that of those we love.

Perfection is an oppressive standard that leaves little room for thanksgiving.

Anxiety is the final movement in our souls that can drive the spirit of thankfulness from us.

We hear about it in the immortal words from the Sermon on the Mount that I read a moment ago.

Anxiety is the place we go when we doubt that God's promises are true for us.

God promises that those who are faithful to Jesus will not be comfortless, in this age or in the one that is coming.

But our world runs on fears of scarcity; how many billions are spent every year on advertising meant to make us anxious about all the things we lack.

The relentless suggestion of our culture is that we might not have enough; we might outlive our retirement savings; we might not have enough insurance or shoes or comfort or even love.

And some of us live with deep spiritual anxiety, that perhaps the promises of God are not true for me.

Perhaps I'll end up penniless and friendless and even excluded from the Kingdom of God.

Anxiety can be an overwhelming force against thankfulness, directing all our attention to an uncertain future and away from the grace of our present and past.

So boredom, perfectionism, and anxiety are three of our enemies in the spiritual life, enemies of a thankful spirit.

How do we oppose them?

Simply by living the Christian life.

If you are rooted in Word and Sacrament, you will hear the promise of the Gospel in preaching and the daily reading of scripture and at the Lord's table.

You will know a God who promises to provide for you,  
A God who challenges you to a life of service and sacrifice  
A God who loves you limitlessly even in your imperfection.

Simply being together as the Body of Christ week by week and founding our deepest hopes on the grace and peace of Jesus Christ is our stance against boredom, perfection, and anxiety.

And if we allow God to change us through his word and sacrament, we will be not be bored; there is so much Kingdom building work to do!

We need not be perfect; for we follow a Savior whose victory was achieved through the utter failure of the Cross.

And we need not be anxious; for abundant lives of eternal merit have been freely offered to us.

So, strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.