

## ***"A Chosen Few"***

Rev. Jeff Bacon

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Let's join our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, you have called us; may we be among your chosen few. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

Happy Thanksgiving! We give thanks today, for the bounty of the harvest, for our families, and for our many blessings. How are you celebrating Thanksgiving this year? It's difficult for families to gather together for Thanksgiving dinner and remain physically distanced. We grieve the loss of our Thanksgiving traditions, but Erma Bombeck made an insightful observation about our traditional Thanksgiving dinner of roasted turkey, bread and sausage stuffing, gravy and giblets, mashed potatoes, squash puff, string beans, cabbage and carrot coleslaw, cranberry relish, pumpkin pie with whipped cream and apple pie with ice cream. Erma Bombeck said that "Thanksgiving dinners take eighteen hours to prepare. They are consumed in twelve minutes. [Football] Half-times take twelve minutes. This is not coincidence." But what a wonderful 12 minutes it is to celebrate and give thanks together!

The first North American Thanksgiving is traced back to 1578 when the English navigator Martin Frobisher held a formal ceremony in what is now Newfoundland, to give thanks for surviving the long journey across the Atlantic. About forty years later, and also after crossing the Atlantic, French settlers led by Samuel de Champlain held huge feasts of thanksgiving in Nova Scotia and they shared their food with their native neighbours. This would be about the same time as the English pilgrims who landed near Cape Cod, gave thanks and celebrated with roast wild turkey for surviving a year of hardships.

On Sept 16, 1620 two ships set sail for America: the Speedwell and the Mayflower. The Speedwell encountered difficulty as they began their journey, so when the two ships went to port in Plymouth England, the 42 passengers from the Speedwell joined the 60 passengers and 30 crew members aboard the Mayflower. Most of these 102 passengers on the Mayflower were devout Christians. They were

going to America, a promised land freed from the Church of England, so they could worship God as they believed the scriptures taught.

They set sail for America with great excitement and expectations, but it wasn't long before the trip became difficult. Many of the passengers became sea sick in the cramped quarters; the nights were cold, damp and dark; and tempers flared in the foul hold of the ship. Fierce storms shook the ship with tremendous force and cracked one of the main beams when they were about half way across the Atlantic. The ship's Master had the beam secured and it's recorded that they "committed themselves to the will of God and resolved to proceed." The battered ship was at sea for 66 days when it finally came within sight of Cape Cod on November 19, 1620. Two people died at sea and two babies were born.

We usually picture the first Thanksgiving as the time when the pilgrims and the local people got together for a great feast. But the first American thanksgiving was really when the sea-battered Mayflower was anchored in the bay at Cape Cod in late November, and a group of weary men and women fell to their knees, praising God for bringing them safely through the treacherous seas to this new land.

Over the coming months, the pilgrims struggled to establish themselves in the new land. Forty seven of the 102 passengers died during that first winter. The following fall, the remaining pilgrims celebrated and gave thanks to God for their first harvest. It's this Thanksgiving feast that's memorialized in the US Thanksgiving holiday. Struggling survivors giving thanks to God.

Our gospel reading this morning describes an even older tradition of gathering for a thanksgiving feast; a feast to celebrate and give thanks at a wedding. It's the third parable in a row that Jesus tells to the chief priests and Pharisees who confront him when he returns to the Jerusalem Temple to teach. The previous day, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem riding on a donkey and created havoc by driving out all who were selling and buying in the Temple, and by overturning the tables of the money changers. In the first parable, each of the two sons says one thing and does another – the message is don't be like the religious leaders who profess faith in God but don't do the will of God. In the second parable, the vineyard owners'

servants and then his son are killed by the wicked tenants – the message is don't be like the religious leaders who reject and kill the Son of God. The culminating third parable in the group of three parables brings Jesus' message to a climax and theological conclusion.

But it's a troubling parable this morning. The king invites guests to his son's wedding and all of the invited guests decide at the last moment not to attend. So, the king rounds up a bunch of people from the city streets to be the guests at a party they never would have dreamed of attending. Strangely though, the king notices one of the guests who isn't wearing a wedding robe and has him bound hand and foot and thrown out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It sounds scary. Why is the guest dressed inappropriately and why is the punishment so severe? We can identify with parts of Jesus' parable: the wedding feast; people giving excuses for not attending the party; and the king's generosity. But other parts don't seem to make sense.

Dave Faulkner wrote that one of his cousins married the daughter of a captain in the Army Catering Corps who said he would organise the food at the reception. And so, on a cold February day, after the wedding ceremony, they trekked to the barracks for the reception. As they arrived, the usual champagne flute glasses were offered, along with appetisers. As they ate the appetisers, they waited for the main course. But it never came. The appetisers were the meal.

Some of Dave's family later went to his aunt and uncle's house, and ordered in fish and chips. Just as they were getting started, the doorbell rang and in came the bride and groom. "Fish and chips?" they said, "Great! Can we have some?"

It wasn't the wedding banquet they had expected. And it certainly wasn't anything like what the king had planned for his son's wedding. With oxen and fat calves it would have been quite a feast, like what we might expect at Buckingham Palace.

The gospel readings for the past two Sundays, and the parable of the wedding feast today, are allegories; stories that represent something more meaningful than their literal interpretation. The king is God, and his son, for whom the king has prepared the wedding feast, is Jesus. Jesus is often portrayed as the bridegroom

and the Church is implied as his bride. The original wedding guests are the people of Israel. In the parable, the wedding guests were invited well in advance and had RSVP'd "Yes." This original invitation and response are God's call to the people of Israel and their covenant with God. Then, on the day of the wedding, it was customary for the host to send servants to remind all of the guests. Like last week, God first sends the Former Prophets and then sends the Latter Prophets. The people give lots of excuses. Some are angry and kill some of the prophets.

The king has prepared a magnificent feast and is enraged. The king sends troops to destroy the city, which likely relates to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and much of the city of Jerusalem by the Roman troops in 70 AD. But the wedding feast is not cancelled. The king sends servants a third time to extend the invitation to everyone. These final servants are the Christian missionaries of the early church, who invite all to experience the love of God: Jews and gentiles, rich and poor; good and bad; everyone is invited.

Finally, the king notices a guest who's not wearing a wedding robe. When a person converts to Christianity, it's as if they're putting on a new set of clothes; giving up their old ways and putting on a new Christian identity. Paul tells the Romans to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and he tells the Galatians that those "baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

The guest who has not worn a wedding robe, refused to be clothed in Christ; they're not a follower of Jesus. All are invited into the kingdom of heaven. But with the invitation comes an obligation to have faith in Jesus. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." It's a wonderful invitation to everyone, and in the final judgement, we will be among a chosen few who are clothed in Christ and living according to the grace and will of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.