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**Thanksgiving Eve, November 21, 2018**  
**Year B**

**Primary Text: Matthew 6:25-33**

**Sermon Title: “Supplications, Prayers, Intercessions, and Thanksgivings”**

## **Theme**

Today’s readings reflect two of the strains that go into the celebration of a national day of thanksgiving: gratitude for abundant harvest (Joel) and civic prayer for a peaceable common life (1 Timothy). The core meaning of Thanksgiving for many of us—a home feast for extended family and friends—is not reflected in the readings; but it is reflected weekly in the church’s meal of thanksgiving (eucharist). What we wish for both these thanksgiving meals is that they will go deeper than celebration of one another and our own blessings, to recognize in our true Host one who wants everyone brought to the table.

## **Text**

[Jesus said,] <sup>25</sup>“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup>Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup>And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup>And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup>yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup>Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup>For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup>But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

## Sermon

What an interesting grouping of readings called for by the lectionary for this Thanksgiving Eve service. I think it could be argued that these texts do not overtly contain elements of thanksgiving as far as I can see. What does the LORD have in store for us? Let us dig in and see.

Regarding the Gospel Reading, contextually, Jesus was preaching and teaching on a high spot on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And because this event occurred early in his public ministry, Jesus' audience was likely mostly peasant Jews along with his own recently selected disciples. There might have been some Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, priests or rabbis in attendance, those who would become his adversaries as his ministry unfolded, but the text does not say.

So I am suggesting that the crowd was mostly Jewish peasants who struggled to eke out a living day by day. That is significant because they gave up a day of work to hear Jesus speak, and at least as far as our passage for this evening goes, his message was basically, "Get your priorities right. Don't worry, God's got this."

As an example, he went on to talk about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and held these simple animals and plants up as examples of how we should get this right. God cares for them, his logic went, and so how much more will God care for you?

And as a counter-example, he referenced the Gentiles, those considered unclean by the Jews; they are the ones who worry about food and clothing and tomorrow, because they don't have a loving, providing Heavenly Father like the Jews do.

But they, the Jews, Jesus' audience ought to know better and do better trusting in God posited Jesus. And then as we know, at the end of the day, Jesus demonstrated this truth by taking what little he had at his disposal and feeding all of them and having a lot left over, as if to say, "I told you. Don't worry. God's got this."

The prophet Joel wrote a similar admonition in the First Reading. Poetically, Joel wrote,

<sup>21</sup>Do not fear, O soil;  
be glad and rejoice,

for the LORD has done great things!  
<sup>22</sup>Do not fear, you animals of the field,  
for the pastures of the wilderness are green;  
the tree bears its fruit,  
the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

And then turned his attention to the people of God. 'You have nothing to fear. Put your trust in the LORD and all will be well. There will be plenty for all.'

But we know that isn't true, don't we? There are hungry people everywhere and around the world. That is why we have the ELCA Hunger Appeal and our own Food Distribution ministry. Today, in 2018, people are dying of starvation. And I would argue, that it is because most of the world doesn't trust the LORD that there will be enough, and so we save and store and hoard our resources. It's the same among Christians. We worry that we will not have enough, and so we too save and store and hoard our resources – at the expense of those who don't have enough.

In the Second Reading from First Timothy, Paul attempted to redirect the energy of his companion and fellow worker, Timothy, to more godly pursuits. He wrote,

<sup>1</sup>First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, <sup>2</sup>for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. <sup>3</sup>This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

I believe that Jesus and Paul would have been in sync on these priorities. Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings are to be made on behalf of everyone, so that all will have enough. And if we do this the Spirit will work on us and knowing better, we will do better.

I don't really know for sure what the logic of selecting these readings for Thanksgiving is, but that is the beauty of the lectionary. These are the selections and so I as the preacher am required to figure that out.

**Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

Here is what I think the message is that the LORD has for us this Thanksgiving Eve.

First and foremost, *trust in the LORD*. The LORD yearns for our attention, devotion and our trust.

Second, *don't worry*. Don't worry about food or clothing or home or anything for that matter. Now I didn't say, sit back and wait for others to read your mind and deliver your needs to you. You need to take care of yourself as best as you are able, but then ask for help, and the LORD will provide. God's message for us is, "Don't worry. I got this."

And finally, with less to worry about we are to spend our energy on more important issues, like "*supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings*" as Paul wrote, so that all may lead "quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and dignity."

So the appropriateness of these readings finally surfaces in one of the admonitions that Paul brought to his companion Timothy. Give thanks. Give thanks always. And give thanks first.

Don't worry. Our loving Heavenly Father has this. Trust him.

And now that we know better, we ought to do better. Let's heed the Apostle Paul's urging and commit ourselves to *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings*.

## **Prayer**

Our loving Heavenly Father, we do give you thanks this Day of Thanksgiving. And we pray that your Spirit would guide us to be less concerned about our needs, and instead learn to trust you more. And we also pray for all those in our community and in the world who do not have enough. We trust that you provide enough for all. Put systems of justice in place so that all may have enough. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen