

**Thanksgiving?
Don Lincoln
Colossians 3: 12-17**

I recently rediscovered in my files a diet a good friend passed on to me. It's the stress diet, relieving stress that increases during the day. (Not that that happens to any of us in here!)

Breakfast:

1/2 grapefruit
1 slice dry whole wheat toast
8 oz. skim milk

Lunch:

4 oz. broiled skinless chicken breast
1 cup steamed spinach
1 cup herb tea
1 Oreo cookie

Mid-Afternoon snack:

The rest of Oreos in the package
4 Snickers bars

Dinner:

1 extra-large sausage, mushroom, and cheese pizza
2 whole loaves garlic bread
1 large pitcher Coca-Cola
1 half gallon Rocky Road ice cream, 1 jar hot fudge sauce

Late Evening Snack:

Entire frozen Mrs. Smith's cheesecake (eaten directly from freezer)

Maybe that's exactly what Thursday's thanksgiving feeding frenzy will be for some of us. A stress reliever. A food extravaganza unlike any other time of year, when we pull out all the stops – when there's no counter space left in the kitchen, not enough room in the oven or the fridge for everything – and a table overflowing heaping platters of food. Enough food to make you forget ANYTHING!

For some of us, Thanksgiving will itself be the stress inducer. Some of us because we have yet to cook a turkey to perfection. Others because there will be family tension seated at the table. Still others because Uncle Joe, the loud-mouthed Democrat (or Republican, or

Socialist – take your pick) will insist on dropping bombshell proclamations upon the family feast along with the carved gobbler.

The stress.

I'm not sure what all the stresses were at that first Thanksgiving in 1621. The pilgrim story we reenacted in grade school was probably way more tame and mundane than what the first settlers and first nations peoples experienced. And – historians tell us there was probably more venison, more clams and more mussels on their table than turkey.

It wasn't until 242 years later, in 1863, in the midst of a dark and bloody chapter in American history, the Civil War, that President Abraham Lincoln called for a national day of Thanksgiving. (It was at the urging of a woman who for 27 years had lobbied governors and presidents for a National Day of Gratitude.....and only Lincoln listened!). Lincoln believed observing such a holiday would promote unity, and remind a divided nation of the many blessings shared by all of its citizens. Listen to his proclamation:

“The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God.”

Lincoln goes at length to describe that in the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the plough and field still produce; ships still bring cargo; mines still provide fuel, and the country continues to expand as freedom increases.

As Lincoln continues:

“No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People.

I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.

And I recommend that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to God for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are

unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty's Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union."

What fitting words for us.

You and I bring the stresses of the year to our tables this Thanksgiving. Multiple hurricanes, devastating wildfires, shootings too numerous to count, an opioid crisis, racist demonstrations, political division and rancorous discourse, international tensions – not to mention continued hunger, injustice, and tragedy.

Yet we have received, so many of us, blessing upon blessing. The field still produces; our larders are full; we go about our day most of us in health and peace and prosperity. We are citizens of a great, great nation. But, sisters and brothers, you and I are also citizens of another kingdom – the Kingdom of God. And it is God, who by His power at work within us, is able to do infinitely more than we dare to ask or imagine – even bring to the tensions of these days in our land, a time of healing, a time of renewal.....a time of justice and hope for all.

You and I are called, as citizens of that Kingdom, called by God as always – to be a light to the nations – leaven in the loaf – salt to preserve, heal and save. So that we, in humility, would not forget God's blessings, nor forget to beg God's healing of our perversities.

You and I are to be people shaped by God's kingdom vision, which is different in thought, word and deed. What might you and I bring to our tables this Thursday, to our work and our conversation and our politics and our living -- our coming and our going – every day? How might the virtues of God's kingdom at work within us do infinitely more than we dare ask or imagine by contributing to the healing and strengthening of our nation? And what are those virtues?

Today's scripture from the letter to the Colossians reminds us we are to be thankful. And it describes HOW you and I are to live as thankful citizens of God's Kingdom. How you and I are to witness to the heart of that other Kingdom, and how we are to treat one another – neighbor and stranger alike – in ways that will bless us, bless our community, and bless our land.....

So I've done it a little backwards this morning (sermon before Scripture reading) because I wanted to let the Word of God stand on its own, and commend to you and to me, **WHO** we are to be and **HOW** we are to be grateful to God that our living by that Word, might make this nation's thanksgiving ever more full in the coming year, for all people.

So.....listen to God's word from **Colossians 3: 8-10; 12-17**

But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the

old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

May it be so. Amen.