

Hillcrest Congregational Church, UCC
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November 22, 2009
Giving Thanks and Sharing Truth
John 18: 33-38a, Matthew 6:24-34

Today, in anticipation of thanksgiving, I would like to start by doing something very different. Last week I asked you to think about something you were especially thankful for. Everyone got something in mind?

Now I would like to invite you to tell someone about it. Pick one other person, next to you, or in the pew in front or back of you, or even across the room. Someone you know or someone you don't know. If this is not something you wish to participate in, that is okay. I am inviting you. You can say no. You can just sit quietly thinking about what you are thankful for or perhaps you would just like to talk to God about it. I want to emphasize you have a choice and whatever choice you make, that is okay.

Now I will give you a moment to find someone to talk to. Does everyone who wants one have a partner to talk to? If not raise your hand.

Now I would like to have you take turns. One of you will talk and one will listen. You will each have a few minutes and I will tell you when to switch. If you do not know each other, please introduce yourselves. Then, do two things. First, please tell your partner what you are thankful for.

Then, even more important, take the time to really tell them why you are thankful.

Thank you for participating together or with God, as you felt comfortable.

Thanksgiving...we have much to be thankful for. In the scripture from Matthew, Jesus says, "... do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear...indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." Yet, I read an article earlier this week that reported that hunger is at a 14 year high. I calculated that one in 18 people in the United States went hungry last year. Worldwide it is much worse, one in seven people went hungry.

Jesus said God knows what we need, but he also said we would have the poor and the hungry with us always. In our reading from John, Pilate asked Jesus if he were a king. As usual, Jesus didn't answer. Instead he said, "I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?' Indeed, what is truth? Will God provide or will we go hungry?"

We also heard Jesus say, "My kingdom is not of this world...strive first for the kingdom of God..." And "...everyone who belongs to the truth listens..." Today you listened to each other's truth, and by so doing you created and shared beloved community, the kingdom of God.

Now listen again to truth. I spoke to a fellow clergy member this week about preaching thanksgiving in the midst of hunger. Anthony suggested instead of facts and figures, I connect you to the truth with a story. I decided to share his story with you.

Anthony and his wife Kate saw and were concerned about the needs of the hungry and homeless in their community. So they decided to do something. They started serving dinner to them. It was quite successful and so many of the homeless came that Anthony and Kate needed help. They told friends what they were doing to serve the homeless.

After a while, things changed. There were so many volunteers helping to cook and serve there was nothing for Anthony and Kate to do. So, they sat at the tables and visited with the homeless who came for dinner. They listened to their stories.

It didn't take long but things changed again. The hungry and the homeless became people. And then the people became Jane, Mary, Sam, Jose, and Alex. Anthony and Kate learned about their struggles on the streets and the needs they had. Occasionally they were able to connect them with resources. But there was not much they could personally do to help them. Mostly, Anthony and Kate just listened and got to know Jane and Mary, Sam, Jose and Alex as people, loving them just as they are.

Then Kate was diagnosed with cancer. Because of her reduced immune system, they had to stop going to anywhere in public, including the dinners. Eventually, Kate died. Anthony withdrew from the world for a while. In his grief, he did not feel he could help or listen to anyone, so he did not go to the dinners. But, after several months, one night he decided to go again.

But Anthony did not do any serving or listening that night. When he walked in to the room, Jane and Mary, Jose, Sam, and Alex all greeted him. They all came to him and served him dinner. They all sat with him and gave him hugs. They listened and cried with him, and they loved him, just as he is.

It was not November. I doubt it was a Thursday. And they probably didn't serve any turkey. But that my friends was the kingdom of God and that was Thanksgiving.

Soon we will have some beautiful music. As you listen I ask you to think about what you told your partner you were thankful for and why. Then I invite you to think about how you can specifically share this blessing with someone else. How you can share thanksgiving, how you can share the kingdom of God.