

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario

Sunday, October 8, 2017

Rev. Andrew Reid

Psalm 65

A Thanksgiving sermon in three parts

Thanksgiving part 1: Psalm 65:1-4

The congregation was asked to help write the words “Thanks be to God” in as many different languages as possible. These were posted in the sanctuary.

Thanksgiving part 2: Psalm 65:5-8

The children were asked to write or draw something that they wanted to give thanks for. These were also posted in the sanctuary. As they did, the congregation was asked to share a Thanksgiving story with one another.

Thanksgiving part 3: Psalm 65:9-13

I started my ministry in two churches in the north-east of Scotland. One church was in a village of about 400 people, surrounded by farmland. It is an area of some of the best farmland in Scotland, rich and productive. Some of the farmers grew barley to be sold to be malted in whisky distilleries close by. Others grew potatoes and turnips to feed animals, and wheat to be made into bread. Others grew canola, to be made into oil for cooking and other things. Some of them had livestock, mainly cows and pigs, but hardly any of them had chickens.

The other church was out in the country on the edge of the Highlands. The land there was much rougher and rockier, and the climate could be much harder and colder in winter. The land there was not as good for growing things, but many of the farmers there had sheep, a breed called blackface sheep, tough, hardy animals that can survive being outside on the hills in the snowy winter months. And there was a lot of forestry on the lower slopes, where pine and birch and oak trees grew.

Every year, each church had a Thanksgiving service. Not just in my churches but everywhere in Scotland, it is called Harvest Thanksgiving. That is because it is the time when the farmers and people who live in farming communities give thanks for the harvest that they have had that year.

And like us, they decorate the church for Harvest Thanksgiving. But they don't bring in pumpkins and gourds the way we do. They bring in bales of hay, and sheaves of wheat, and baskets of potatoes and turnips, and give thanks to God.

But Harvest Thanksgiving is not held on the second Tuesday of October, the way we celebrate Thanksgiving in Canada. It is not held on the fourth Thursday of November, the way Thanksgiving is celebrated in the United States. The date of Harvest Thanksgiving changed every year in my churches. It all depended on when the harvest was in. Some years, it was early, and some years it was late. It all depended on the weather and what sort of growing season there had been.

So one of the things I had to do each September was ask the farmers in the churches when they thought they would have the harvest brought in. Their answers allowed me to set the date and start to plan the Harvest Thanksgiving services. And though the two churches were only a few kilometres apart, their Harvest Thanksgiving services were hardly ever held on the same Sunday.

You see, the important thing was to know what they were giving thanks to God for. It wasn't just something that they did because everyone else was doing it. It wasn't something that they did because Thanksgiving Day was the second Tuesday of October. They wanted it to be as real and as meaningful as possible for themselves and for their community.

Which is what giving thanks to God is all about: making it real and meaningful. Remembering that everything we have comes from God. Giving thanks to God for everything that we have. Because we receive God's gifts – and God's greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord – every day of our lives.

Remember what Jesus said:

²⁵Therefore 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? ²⁶Look 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? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But 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? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.' Matthew 6:25-34.