

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, October 9, 2016**  
**Rev. Andrew Reid**  
**Deuteronomy 26:1-11; John 6:25-35**  
**Sermon Part I: Thanksgiving**

Part I: The Hebrew people were told what they had to do when they got to the land that God was leading them to. They were to go into the land, and settle down, and plant crops, and harvest them to make sure they had enough to eat. They had been wandering through the wilderness for 40 years, living on whatever they could find, and sometimes having to depend on God to provide food when they couldn't find any for themselves. So when they reached the Promised Land, I am sure they were r-e-a-l-l-y happy to have the chance to grow their own food on their own land with their own tools and their own hard work.

And that's just what they did. They must have prepared the ground and dug the soil and sowed the seed, and tended the plants until they were ready to be harvested. I am sure it must have been hard work, but I'm also sure they were so happy not to be wandering around the wilderness any more that they were ready to do the hard work.

And it all paid off when the time came for their first harvest. I'm not sure exactly what they planted, but it would have been whatever they needed to eat and stay healthy. And so their first harvest was a time to celebrate, maybe even to have a party or two. They had their own produce, their own food, and they had grown it on their own land, and it was their own hard work that made it happen.

But it wasn't all about them. It wasn't all about what they had managed to do for themselves. It wasn't all about their hard work and their food and their produce. God was a part of it all as well. They had to remember that. And they had to show God that they remembered that. So they were told what they had to do.

They had to take some of the first of all the fruit from the harvest – the very first of it, not what was left over when they had had enough for themselves. They had to take the very first of all the fruit of the harvest and give it to God. They had to put it in baskets and take it to the priest, and then the priest would offer it to God. And there were some words that the people were to say when they brought it, words that told the story of all that God had done for them and their people. And finally, when they had done all that, then they were to share the food with others and celebrate.

We celebrate Thanksgiving in Canada on the second Monday of October. It's the time when we celebrate the harvest and thank God for all the blessings we have received. It wasn't always on the second Tuesday of October, but in 1957, the Governor General of

Canada issued a proclamation. The proclamation announced: "A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed – to be observed on the second Monday in October."

And that is why we have this service today. I have a couple of things that I want you to do that will help us celebrate Thanksgiving today. I'll tell you about that in a moment. But right now we are going to sing one of the best-known harvest thanksgiving hymns, number 807: We plough the fields and scatter.

## **Sermon Part 2: Giving thanks**

Part 2: Here is what I want you to do to help us celebrate Thanksgiving. In your bulletin this morning, you will find a blank piece of paper. I am going to give you a couple of minutes now to do two things.

The first thing I want you to do is to write or draw – or write and draw – something that you want to thank God for. Something that makes life special to you. Something that, if you didn't have it, you would be really sorry. Maybe it's a thing, or maybe it's a person. Just something or someone that you want to thank God for.

And the second thing I want you to do is to write or draw – or write and draw – something or someone that you want to pray for. Something or someone that you care about, something or someone you are concerned about, something or someone who needs someone to pray for them.

If you need help, or if you can't decide what to write or draw, then it's ok to ask someone to help you. And if you need a pen or a pencil, then we have them right here. Just let me know ....

OK, here is the next thing I want you to do. When we come to the point in the service when we pray for other people, I will stop speaking for a moment or two. When I stop, I want you to look at your piece of paper with whatever you have written or drawn on it, and say a silent prayer for what you want to pray about. We don't have to say our prayers aloud: God hears when we pray in silence. We don't even need to say a prayer at all: just look at your paper, or touch it, or hold it up to God, and God will know.

And when the service is over, if you want, you can leave your prayer in this basket here at the front of the church. That way, you and your prayers will be your part of our Thanksgiving celebration today, as we give thanks to God together.