

November 22, 2009

Ephesians 1:15-23

Living Beneath Our Means

If we live well above our means in a physical existence, we will be all too content to live well beneath our means spiritually.

Thanksgiving has its own set of symbols -- turkeys, pilgrims, pumpkins and Indian corn. But the symbol that best expresses the abundance that Thanksgiving celebrates is the cornucopia.

The cornucopia is an ancient symbol used in both Greek and Roman mythology.

In Greek myths, a goat whose milk fed the infant Zeus was said to have a horn that was always filled with whatever anyone wanted to eat or drink.

In Roman myths the goddess of plenty, named "Copia," always carried a horn filled with fruits and drinks. The magical horn of plenty was always full; its abundance could never be exhausted.

One remarkable thing about Thanksgiving is that it has been less commercialized than many other holidays on our calendar, especially Christmas or Easter.

There are still many families who would never dream of saying grace that suddenly feel compelled to offer up some form of thanks before carving up the fatted bird and diving into the dressing.

Yet our grateful acknowledgment of abundance often has the tendency to drift into an orgy of sheer gluttony.

Somehow, Thanksgiving has never become diet-conscious America's sacred day of overindulgence.

Instead of being "commercialized," Thanksgiving has been "internalized" and "narcissist," focusing wholly on satisfying the self.

Consider some of our recent traditions. We buy Butterball turkeys the size of small children and spend more time trying to stuff them into our ovens than filling them with stuffing.

This enormous bird is then fed to family gatherings that keep getting smaller and smaller every year. Eating at least two desserts is practically mandatory.

We've even carried this spirit of "too much of a good thing is ... wonderful" into our Thanksgiving day entertainment -- the day of relentless rounds of unending football games.

In many ways, Thanksgiving has come to embody our national tendency to "live beyond our means."

We surround ourselves with more food and drink and amusements than we can possibly enjoy in one day -- but we refuse to give up any of it.

Thanksgiving is a holiday that all too easily can symbolize our socially approved and nationally sanctioned addiction to consumerism and materialism.

But, if we seem determined to live well above our means in our physical existence, we seem all too content to live well beneath our means spiritually.

The cornucopia, the horn of plenty that symbolizes Thanksgiving so well, should sound the joyful noise of God's bountiful blessings.

Page 3

We should be thankful for the abundant, overflowing graciousness that God makes available in our lives.

There is no need to live beneath your means Spiritually.

Share the abundance God has given you regardless of how small you think that abundance is.

The cornucopia horn of plenty also sounds a warning:

A note to shake us out of our self-preoccupied complacencies and selfish accumulations, a note to remind us that we must use our blessings to bless others.

The epistle lesson today is in the true spirit of Thanksgiving. Paul's prayer in Ephesians celebrates the cornucopia of blessings available only through God's grace.

God intends for all believers much more than a scrape-by existence or a bread- and-water blessing.

Christ did not suffer death and then triumphantly rise again to demonstrate that God intends life to be a mean and measly affair.

Paul's lesson is a reminder of the extravagance God wants to pour into our lives.

Jesus proclaimed that he had come to give life abundantly to all who believe. Exorbitant blessings, Paul insists, await those who respond to God's "call" and enter into their "inheritance."

Part of the blessing God intends for our lives is the joy of living within a community of faith.

Page 4

Our church, which is the very body of Christ -- not simply some institutional afterthought, is this community.

Living in a community like ours, especially one so exceedingly blessed with God's power, requires a spiritual commitment of responsibility from all of us.

God is not an abstract idea.

God is a dynamic, doing God -- acting, creating, and loving -- in the lives of all people.

Jesus Christ is the best example of God's proactive involvement in human life.

Why Jesus? Why the coming season of Advent and Christmas? Because:

Beauty is an abstraction until it finds expression in a flower. Music is a fantasy until the notes of an instrument give it speech. Art is ethereal until it embodies itself in sculpture or in a picture.

The great things of created and uncreated thought are only grasped and understood when they find expression in some easy, intelligible and often substantial form.

A young couple from the hills of Tennessee got involved in a church where there was a lot of shouting and clapping and great enthusiasm in the Sunday worship service.

The young couple were trying to convince his Grandma that she should attend church with them.

"You should have seen it," the young man said to his Grandma. "The Holy Spirit was really alive in the worship service!"

Grandma kept rocking and didn't say a word.

"And, Grandma," said the young woman, "you should have seen the preacher. He really got with it. He was screaming at the top of his voice and the people were popping up like popcorn to praise the Lord.

It was unbelievable!"

Again, Grandma kept right on rocking.

Finally, the young man said, "Grandma, don't you like our church? You never seem to say."

Grandma finally spoke: "Honey, let me just put it this way. I don't care how loud they shout, and I don't care how high they jump. It's what they do when they come back down that counts."

We are exploring new ways to worship God and attract new people here at Franklin Church. We will begin some of these ideas in the New Year! I am 100% behind attracting new people to our church.

But we too must remember that what we do after the service is really what counts. God has given us abundant blessings so we can share our blessings with others.

Even in the mist of the many hardships faced by individuals in this sanctuary and in our surrounding community, we have reason to celebrate.

Even when things seem about as bad as they can get, with no sign of relief in sight; we can still be thankful.

Now is not the time to give a mere passing mention to the celebration of Thanksgiving.

This is the time for our church and community to get matters into their proper perspective.

Page 6

Regardless of what life may bring, let's thank God for blessings always present.

As Paul puts it in today's lesson:

“God has put all things under Christ control and has made Christ the head over all things for the church, which is Christ's body, the fullness of Christ who fills all in all.”

Amen.

