

Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

I hope that everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving. Although I think that most people don't see it this way, but Thanksgiving really is a miraculous holiday. We'll get to that more in just a minute.

First, though, let me get to another brief thought that plagues me each year at this time. I hope that I don't sound too negative, but, I suppose in light of our Gospel passage about coming of the flood in Noah's day that swept all the people away and people being plucked right out of the field, maybe it's ok.

You see, just like what Jesus was doing for the Disciples in our passage, sometimes there are things that need to come from the pulpit and from God's church. There are things that need to be called out and this past Friday is one of them. Now, let me also say that if you went out and participated in the Black Friday chaos as we kicked off what has become known as the official start of the Christmas season, I hope that the place or places you went to were orderly and peaceful and joy filled. I have the same hope each year; the hope that this year will be better than last, and unfortunately, each year I am sorely disappointed. Like I said, I bring this up only because I think that it is a responsibility of the church to speak to the ills of our culture.

I made the mistake this year, which I seem to do every year, of watching the news and the videos that were posted from two days ago. I read about a man who was shot and killed because of a parking space at Walmart. I watched videos of fist fights breaking out in stores and at malls. I saw people trampled as the doors to the stores were opened to the pressing mob. All for the

sake of a discounted price on a flat screen TV. Pictures of people laying prostrate on top of a 50 inch Vizio almost as if in worship. What made it more confusing was that these people had left their homes, many having just given thanks for all their blessings, only to be willing, an hour or so later, to scream and yell and attack and kick and belittle a fellow human being over the last copy of Fifty Shades of Grey DVD for \$2. All of this taking place under colorful banners emblazoned with the words Joy and Peace.

Black Friday is not just the busiest shopping day of the year. It also happens to be the third busiest day in emergency rooms across the country. New Years Day is first with its alcohol and drunk driving. Fourth of July is second with alcohol, dehydration, and fireworks accidents. And then Black Friday with its over consumption from the Thanksgiving feast and the retail absurdity and brutality because of the perceived need for a new electronic gadget. From every pulpit in this country we should be crying out against whatever it is that drives people to act in this way. Maybe our Gospel passage this morning is more appropriate than we might have thought for the beginning of Advent in speaking about the days just prior to Noah building his boat.

So why does it happen? Why is it that this type of thing happens each year in our modern times? Well, that brings me back to Thanksgiving and how Thanksgiving is truly a miraculous holiday. The problem we have in our day is that is that I'm not sure that it is often looked at that way. As a matter of fact, I think that it is safe to say that it is definitely not looked at in that way. I'm not sure that the Pilgrims or all our official Presidential proclamation understood the power there was, and is, in what they were doing, but Thanksgiving is a miraculous holiday, or at least it can be.

Now, you might be thinking, Christmas, the birth of our Savior, God with us, now I get that. That it miraculous. Easter. Life from death. An empty tomb after a brutal execution. Now, that is miraculous. But Thanksgiving? How is that miraculous? Well, let me tell you.

The reason why thanksgiving, not the holiday but the action, the giving of thanks, is miraculous is because it is our language for communication with God. A thankful and humble heart is the conduit to our Creator. It is the frequency to which we tune, in order to connect to the Almighty. Through it we find our voice to speak to God and within it our ears are tuned to hear His reply. Without gratefulness, without gratitude, there is only spiritual static and worldly confusion. That is why I start most prayers with thanks, before I get to any need, or hope, that I might have to lay at God's feet.

It is who we are, who we were made to be. We were made for a proper relationship with God and that proper relationship is one that is built around thankfulness. Thankfulness, a thankful attitude, in many ways clears out the clutter within the world around us. It enables us to recognize who we are and the blessings we have received and it brings to us a better understanding of God and all that He has given. It clears away the clutter and sets things into

their proper perspective. Just as a faithful life brings thankfulness, a thankful life is the foundation of our on-going faithfulness.

The people of Old Testament Israel knew this very well. As a matter of fact, at faithful times in their history, they had groups of people who were appointed to take shifts in order to give a continuous stream of thanks to God on behalf of the entire nation and people of Israel. King David made special instruments just for this purpose to be used by the priests, and when David stood to give thanks, trumpets blared out to God and the entire nation stood with him. One Psalm after another, from the beginning of the book to the end, is a litany of thanks. Israel, at least at certain times, got it and when they did they flourished.

And it wasn't just the Old Testament. We saw the power of thanks in the works of Jesus. When five thousand hungry people were gathered, he took a meager amount of food and gave thanks to His Father in Heaven, and that food fed everyone there, with left overs for later. Standing outside a tomb he gave thanks and then called Lazarus out, back into life. And standing at the table with Cleopas and his companion he gave thanks and blessed the bread of their evening meal which caused their eyes to be opened to who they had been walking with on the road to Emmaus for the past few hours. Giving thanks is a powerful thing. It connects us to the source of life.

That is what we all need to understand. Thanksgiving, the giving of thanks, is not just a polite thing that do in social situations. It is not even a catchy name for a national feast day. Thanksgiving, when directed towards God is powerful, and I would say even miraculous. It changes lives, ours especially. It brings joy. It opens to us peace. It unites. It does all of this because through our thankfulness to God we find what we are missing and have been trying to fill with a new Xbox or the latest iPhone. We find real joy, true peace, and deep clarity, all by embracing our relationship with God in gratitude.

It is all about thanksgiving. And the way we do that most powerfully in the church is through the Eucharist, which, by the way, is a Greek word that means "great thanksgiving". We come to his altar, into his presence, into the miraculous, with thankful and humble hearts and we are not left the same. We are not left the same and then the world is changed through God's work within and through His church. A truly thankful heart focused on God can change and renew all things...even Black Friday.

But there is one problem that needs to be understood. And it is important that we hear this. Although thankfulness is one of the most powerful things within our lives, because through it we are drawn closer to God, it also seems to be one of the most perishable. If we need any evidence of that, just look back at Friday. At 3:00 in the afternoon people were giving thanks around their tables with their families and friends, and at 5:00 they had lost all connection to God and his hope for humanity. A thankful heart is something that must be guarded and nourished at all times though the relationship it is designed to bring us into. Thanksgiving cannot be just one

day each year. If it is, what we will find outside of that day is a continuous stream of Black Fridays, as people try to replace God with flat screen TVs throughout the rest of the year

Today and all days, let us give thanks to the Lord, our God, for he is good. His Love, and Mercy, and Truth, and Strength endure forever!

Amen