

Rev. Mark Moline
Sermon November 11, 2018 Thank You!

Early November has become sort of a favorite time of the year for me. The air is crisp and we once again enjoy the comfort of a sweater or light jacket. Pumpkins are once again for eating rather than haunting. Pumpkin Pie instead of Jack-O-Lanterns means Halloween is behind us. We can now put all of the devils, witches, ghouls, vampires, haints and ogres out of our minds and hearts for another year - Calories again become our worst nightmare.

We can now savor a little gratefulness, gratitude, appreciation and thanksgiving – especially that spirit of thanksgiving expressed toward our Creator. It may seem a bit early for a Thanksgiving Sermon, -- but if we wait for the actual day itself, we may find it consumed by football and feasting – and then we quickly slip into the materialistic tension of Black Friday before we can adequately count our blessings. A season of THANKSGIVING before we Over-Dose on shopping, means we can with thankful hearts look forward to a blessed Thanksgiving Day (repleat with football and feasting) and then on to the rest of the holidays.

Of course, let us never forget to pray for, encourage and love those among us are perhaps facing difficult emotional times this year during the holidays. You as a church family have lost some very dear folks in the past few years. We are thankful for their faith and the good examples they set for us.

On page 857 of the Book of Common Prayer the Episcopal Catechism asks the question, “For what do we offer thanksgiving?” This morning that simple little question seems so over-whelming to me. I mean – just consider all that we have to be thankful for! When it comes to giving God thanks, where do we begin? Then I find the Catechism answer to that question, to be as equally overwhelming, The answer: “Thanksgiving is offered for all the blessings of this life, for our redemption, and for whatever draws us closer to God.” There you have it --- Thanksgiving really is a celebration of, “life.”

I just wonder, if you were preaching this Thanksgiving sermon, where would you begin, how would you approach this overwhelming task. How would you, on a beautiful early November morning, try to use words to do justice to all that God has given us? What would you say? I assure you there are as many good thanksgiving sermons here as there are folks this morning. You each have your own Thanksgiving sermon, and what better time of the year to preach your sermon by living out your gratitude.

I want to narrow in on the second, more specific part of this three part catechism answer – we are to offer Thanksgiving for our “redemption.” After all, we are the Church of the Redeemer. And, as we read in this morning’s second lesson, “He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

I know REDEMPTION sounds a little heavy, perhaps a little too spiritual for an Episcopal Church, but then we are about to celebrate the memorial of our redemption in a sacrament our Prayer Book calls “The Great Thanksgiving.”

Meanwhile back at the catechism (page 849) we encounter the question, “What is redemption?” and the answer is given, “Redemption is the act of God which sets us free from the power of evil, sin and death.” Through redemption we are free from the power of sin. But as we read in John’s first epistle, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” This doesn’t mean sin is OK, quite the contrary. It’s just that a spotlessly clean person does not need a bath. A sinless person does not need redemption. One without sin does not need Christ.

I’ve never met a person without sin. I’ve met a few who claimed to be sinless, who sincerely thought they were, and believed they were doing Christ a personal favor by believing in him. I think that is a fairly dangerous spiritual position in which to find oneself.

So this Thanksgiving Season we are to be thankful for that act of God which sets us free from the power of sin and death.” We are most thankful that: “By his obedience even to suffering and death, Jesus made the offering which we could not make; in him we are freed from the power of sin and reconciled to God!” “By His resurrection, Jesus overcame death and opened for us the way of eternal life.” Eternal Life - Now there is something to be thankful for.

German born Art historian Johannes A. Gaertner wrote, “To speak gratitude is courteous and polite, to enact gratitude is generous and noble, but to live gratitude is to touch Heaven.” During this upcoming Thanksgiving season let us live out our gratitude by living into our redemption in Christ in our interaction with God, self and neighbor. This is indeed a special time of year.