

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures for ever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Matthew 25:31-46

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

"How to Set Your Thanksgiving Table"

Rev. Pam Everhart

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Today is a full day for us. We celebrate and give thanks for many things today. We bless the shoeboxes with the children at 9:15, and we send them off on their way to Operation Christmas Child. We celebrate Christ the King today, this is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday in the Christian calendar. Next Sunday is the Christian New Year, the beginning of Advent. It's hard to believe, but it is. And we offer thanks today for our seniors, who have given so much to this congregation. All of this happens on what we sometimes call Thanksgiving Sunday. That's a lot for one day, but it all fits together really well, I think. We tie it up in a big holiday bow and call it Thanksgiving because all of those things I just mentioned to you are things for which we can indeed be thankful.

And Thanksgiving is a time when we reflect on all that we've been given, and just what I means to us. Thanksgiving is a holiday of reflection. And I don't know about you, but I can't think about Thanksgiving without remembering the elders in my own family. All my grandparents are now deceased, but in my mind's eye, every Thanksgiving, I see both of my grandmothers at their stoves and in their kitchens, and I think about all the wonderful memories attached to my grandmothers and their stoves and their kitchens. My maternal grandmother was called Granny Duck. My grandfather was called Buck, that was the name he went by, and my brother said Granny Duck and Papa Buck, one day, and so the name stuck, and her whole life I only knew her that way, Granny Duck.

Anyway, my Granny Duck was the greatest cook on earth. She really was. She owned a roadside grill, and so there are hundreds of other people who can back me up on my assessment of her cooking. But she made the best turkey and dressing you've ever eaten. Where I'm from, it's called dressing, not stuffing, and granny's was the very, very best. Very moist and delicious, and I've been trying for all of my adult life to master that recipe. She never wrote anything down, so it's trial and error, and I've been trialing and erroring for twenty-something years now. But a couple of years ago I almost got it right. My husband took a bite of it and he said, "It's almost there," and I considered that a great compliment, to put "almost" in front of anything that I'm trying to prepare that was like my Granny Duck's. One bite of that dressing and I knew I was close because it did remind me of her stove and the aromas from her kitchen, and all the joyful times that we had there when I was growing up.

My paternal grandmother was Granny Wilder. My maiden name is Wilder. And she was also a wonderful cook, but what I remember most about her was not her holiday feasts, but her just regular old everyday meals, especially something that we all called the grannyburger. She somehow took an ordinary pound or so of ground beef, and I don't know what she added to it or what she did, but it was just the right amount of everything, and she served it with what she called a Co-Cola, in the bottle, or if it was on sale, she would get RC instead. And she was famous for something called her apple stack cake. When she died my parents asked if I wanted anything from her house, and I said "Grab the stack cake pans, please." They're really old cake pans. My dad was amazed that I wanted something so old and junky that belonged to my grandmother, but you can't find that size any more, and I want to try to replicate that recipe too. They found a couple of recipes for stack cake in her collection. I'm guessing she probably did a little bit of this recipe and a little bit of that one, and a little bit of whatever she wanted to do to it. I'm hoping to replicate that one day. I've not gotten as far with that as I have with the dressing. Maybe one day I will.

All of us have seniors in our lives, some long since passed away, and some are still with us. Some of you are seniors now yourselves, and today we celebrate all of you, all who have reached the golden years. You can decide when you've reached the golden years, I won't tell you whether or not you're there. That's something for you to figure out for yourself. It depends on whether you're getting a discount for the movies, or whether you're drawing a social security check, how old you've got to be at any given time to fit in the senior category. One thing's for sure though. Seniors ain't what they used to be, or

at least not what I thought they used to be, when I was growing up. There are some that have been sidelined into illness and poor health, but many seniors today are at health clubs, or running marathons, or taking road trips. Take a look at the exhibits the seniors brought today for the talents and hobbies they have, and you'll see some of the things that keep them busy. Those among us who are retired tell me they're busier now than they ever were, and if you're that busy when you retire, if I'm going to be busier than I am now, I do not want to retire. I can't imagine being busier than I am now, but I do notice that when people tell me that, they tell me that with a glint in their eye and a smile on their face, so I know that there is great joy from being busier now than when you were working, but choosing everything you do, rather than having someone choose it for you. So maybe I do want to reach that day myself. Some have been retired even longer than they worked, and they've had to reinvent their lives over and over again.

I know one thing for sure. At this church, we would not have nearly as many ministries as we have without the work of our very busy seniors. They keep me running in circles all the time, and today we give thanks for all the seniors in this church who help us in big and small ways, because there are no small parts. All of the work of the seniors keeps this church going. For example, the Senior Council is one of the busiest and most fruitful groups that I've ever worked with. They operate the Care Closet; they operate the ministry where if you need a ride to church you can call, and they'll line you up with somebody to pick you up; they operate the van ministry; they cook, prepare and serve the Double Nickel Luncheon; they help me in visiting; they help me in knowing who to visit; they have begun collaboration with the Occupational Therapy Department at CSU; they organize blood pressure checks and flu shots; they even take road trips to Boulder to get massages; and road trips to Rockies games where sometimes they even pick me up to go with them. They care for one another, that's what's underlying all these things I mentioned, is a genuine care for each other, and lifting each other up.

So, think of a Thanksgiving table, Thanksgiving table in your mind, you have a matriarch and a patriarch, and think about the significant roles they play in the family structure. We have the same here at our church table, our metaphorical Thanksgiving table, but as you know Thanksgiving is not just about the matriarch and the patriarch, but all ages are represented around the table, at the main table and then the annex tables that get stuck off in the kitchen or in the side hall. It's not just Grandma and Grandpa, but adult children and their children and their children, all pulled together to make a family work and to make family memories special. And here at our church, our table is full of people young and old, who make a difference every day. Alyce Kaehler and Martha Conant who did so much work to bring a wonder Faith Club event to our church, Rob Bean and his Big Moo Canoe that he did for the Heifer Project in the spring, his wife Tracey who's done so much work for Crop Walk for our church. We have Grace Harris who has done so much work for the Angola advocates in our conference, Warren Mauk and all his team that pulled together the beautiful Columbarium that we just had a service in this past Wednesday, Brook Jostad and a fast that she'd doing right now for hunger awareness in our community, and all the things she's done to end hunger through the one campaign, Glen Goff and all his endless passion for Habitat for Humanity, and the children of our Sunday School who diligently bring their coins and dollar bills to collect money, most

recently for Heifer International. Every age in this church makes significant contributions to make our world a more blessed place, and we are so thankful for every age and every person and what they do. This church indeed has much to be thankful for.

Our church family is large, but we are connected. Much like your own family, perhaps, the extended family gathered around a Thanksgiving table. You have the children, the teens, the adults, the seniors, that is also us here in our congregation. We are a Thanksgiving table of sorts. There's a place set for each of us here, we only need to find where we should be at that table and join in the feast. And even so, here and now, our feast is wonderful, as I've just mentioned, but it is incomplete. That's why I had Mel read for you the Gospel of Matthew, because that Gospel in Chapter 25 prods us to look beyond the Norman Rockwell painting before us, and figure out how to set a table that truly includes all of us. Who is missing from our Thanksgiving table here? Who is not with us to join in our celebration today? Hear again these words from Matthew: "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"

Our Christian Thanksgiving table, then, is to be set for the least of these members of our family. Who are they? The Scripture says, strangers, those without clothes, food or drink; those who are sick, those who are in prison. Yes, yes, we are supposed to minister to them. We are called to do so, so we should not forget that. But I think Jesus means to extend the table within our family as well. Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. In our own church family, I think Jesus' list would include seniors who are not able to get out much any more, those who spend more time at home or at the doctor's office than anywhere else, and seniors who for one reason or another can no longer attend our worship services. The table that we set, those that Jesus refers to, includes those who are in care facilities now, those who are struggling to make the best of circumstances they often did not choose for themselves and would not have chosen, and their caregivers and spouses and children and siblings who are forced to make painful choices, to place their loved ones in such care centers because there were simply no other choices left.

Jesus walks through the tough times with all of us, and Jesus is certainly walking with all of them. Just as Jesus is with the family gathered here today in this beautiful sanctuary, Jesus is also, right now, in an Alzheimer's unit in the rehab centers, and in the quiet and lonely home at the end of an aging street. Indeed, when we invite these people to our Thanksgiving feast, we also invite Jesus to be among us. So how do we do this? How do we invite those people to our table this year? There's a reason, after all, that they can't be here with us any more. They can't get out and about. Well, we must go to them. Now the college group understands this. A few weeks ago, we were talking service projects over a Sunday lunch, and I had come up with five or six ideas of my own, and they came up with a plan to visit a senior or maybe a couple of seniors in our church family, maybe

take them some dinner, help them out with anything that they might need help with, and mainly just visit and talk with them. That was the college group's idea, not one I had brought in myself, and for that I was thankful. We're working on that right now, we hope to initiate that in a couple of weeks. The college students get it, and they have begun to extend the table, and they're going to make a difference.

Now, there are all kinds of lists in my office of people, some in care centers, some at home, some who for one reason or another don't have the opportunity to be with us here in worship any more. Some only for a temporary time, and some more permanent. Like the college students, we can have many others extending the Thanksgiving table to them. That might mean something as simple as making a phone call, sending a card, taking some flowers, dropping by for a visit. Now I know some of our seniors get a lot of visitors. Some of you are very diligent about visiting the seniors among us. Some of you do it and I don't even know you do it, but you do. Some of our seniors get a fair amount of visits, I think, yet I suspect there are a lot of seniors on our rolls that don't get many visits at all. Jesus is waiting with them for us to pay a visit, to offer them a holiday greeting this year, or maybe a Wednesday greeting or 'it's just a day in the middle of February' greeting. It is our call, says Matthew, to go out and find Jesus in this world, and finding Jesus means looking in places that the world tends to forget. So this year, when you sing "Over the river and through the woods, to Grandmother's house we go," remember that Jesus is also waiting, waiting with grandmothers and grandfathers and others who don't even fit in that category, but have become people the world tends to place on the sidelines. Jesus is calling us to their sides. May we listen for the Gospel call. may we set a table big enough to reach beyond our happy family here, to the extended family that is just beyond our doors. "And the King will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'" Amen.