

Thanksgiving 2017 Mathew 18:18-20

We Gather together

I guess I've said it before, because someone reminded me of it this week, but **my absolute favorite holiday is**

**Thanksgiving.**

**It's all about the food and the gathering together and of course being grateful.**

My childhood Thanksgivings were formal affairs, best dishes, linens and the same recipes year after year.

Turkey baked in a bag, green bean casserole with French fried onions on top and candied yams with toasted marshmallows and of course cranberry sauce made the day before so the house would smell good.

**We also had the tradition of inviting at least one person and often several persons who would otherwise be alone on Thanksgiving.** A widow in the neighborhood, a church secretary, a friend from my dad's work.

It was different every year.

These people weren't poor, they were just alone for the holiday.

It was a good practice of kindness. Years later, my Dad speculated that Mom did this partially so that we would all behave better and practice manners. Either way our holidays were always richer for it.

**There is something about Thanksgiving, about its very nature, that brings people together.**

When Bill and I were newly married, living in Ft. Atkinson, WI, we experienced this Thanksgiving tradition in the reverse.

We weren't planning on driving home to MO.

And my grandmother Alice, who lived in Menominee, was going to be alone so we **decided to go there and offered to bring the meal.**

**"No, No!"** she wasn't going to let us do that.

She would take us out to eat, probably to the Bolo, a local supper club.

We loved the Bolo. Unfortunately, **when we got there, she was embarrassed to tell us that not only the Bolo but all local restaurants were closed.**...but she had found one place open. So we got in the car and drove about 25 miles on county roads and finally pulled into the nearly empty parking lot ...of a truck stop.

No linens, toasted marshmallows or cranberries. But there was turkey and gravy over mashed potatoes and a scoop of canned green beans, apple sauce, and iceberg lettuce. And there was pie. Every truck stop has pie.

**So that was my first thanksgiving away from home,** but we were together and there was food and we were grateful.

It is still one of my favorite thanksgivings.

**Later, that evening,** we drove to my grandmother's extended family in Knapp, WI to have, what I later have learned, is a more **typical WI Thanksgiving.**

**They were all dairy farmers and hunters.**

Their day had started before dawn with turkey, cranberry sandwiches wrapped in wax paper and thermoses of coffee.

Somehow there had been both milking and hunting and then late in the day, the husbands and sons all gathered at "Mom's" house for pie. We had been invited too.

They good naturedly teased us about the truck-stop-Thanksgiving but I thought a spending Thanksgiving in a tree stand was equally laughable.

Since then I have celebrated with Mexican-American friends who served both turkey and green bean casserole but also tortillas and tamales. They filled the house so full, that some guests sat on the basement steps and others stood out on the deck.

**Traditions are important but they are only important if they effectively bind us together as family and friends.**

God does not want us to be alone. Today's gospel reminded us that Jesus said, *"Where two or three are gathered, there I am with you also."*

**In truth, thanksgiving is not a religious holiday.**

It is a national holiday that has roots in the Native Americans and Pilgrim settlers gathering together for meal. Yet from the start, thanksgiving was a time for gratitude. So it is fitting that before we gather at the holiday table, we gather together in church and give thanks to God for all of God's gifts.

Today's scripture lessons all emphasize the blessings that occur when God's people gather together in the Lord's service.

God wants us to be together. He wants that so much that he gave his son, Jesus, to join us here on earth. And Jesus' died and rose so that we *"might all be one."*

*"In ancient times God chose Israel to be his people and then Jesus chose his disciples and finally Christ promised the Holy Spirit to gather God's people into one flock, under the Good Shepherd."* (a quote by Arden Mead in [We Gather Together](#), CCP 2003)

So this morning/evening, **we gather together as thankful people to once again lift up our gratitude.**

Join with me now in signing Come you thankful people come.