

Pastor Jon's Thanksgiving Eve Sermon at Gloria Dei on Wednesday, November 23, 2022.

First, some hospitality. It is good to be here! To my ELCA Colleagues in Neenah, I am grateful for you and your churches. I am thankful that we pray well together.

We welcome Pastor Niveen to our community. Pastor Niveen is a Palestinian Christian who used to work at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. You told me that women couldn't be pastors there (until very recently), so she came to the United States. She is an Old Testament Scholar, specializing in the book of Amos and its social justice message for us today. Niveen loves tea, not coffee.

Pastor Amy, I am here in Neenah because of you and your work in the Synod office. You saw my paperwork come across your computer, and you responded quickly. You were the first synod to interview me. I am forever indebted to you. Your work in hosting the fox valley community table and Christmas dinner for those in need is indeed the work of Jesus. You love white chocolate mochas.

Pastor Tabitha and Pastor Jon, our longest tenured pastors in Neenah. Your heart for service to all people in our community is evident. You helped out St. Marks in their pastoral transition. You host high schoolers and feed them once a week... no easy task. You do blood drives in your church. You live out your passion for the Gospel in humble ways. Tabitha, I saw you volunteering as an election site coordinator at the boat house. Both of your commitment to the word at VBS this year was inspiring. Pastor Jon loves Hazelnut Latte's from Shelatte's, and Pastor Tabitha likes good ole water.

To me, Thanksgiving is the best holiday of the year... because it is centered on food and drink and leftovers.

Food was important to Jesus. In Luke's gospel, there is a meal scene in every chapter if you include the manger scene as a feeding trough. Jesus always celebrated an open table, eating with tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, strangers, and his antagonists.

Speaking of Thanksgiving Dinner. Fun fact. Did you know that typical Americans take in 3,000 calories at their Thanksgiving

celebrations? And if you go back for a 2nd helping of Turkey mashed potatoes, gravy, stuffing and green bean casserole, add another 1000 calories per plate.

But why is it that at 9:00 at night, we wake up from our tryptophan slumber, and we are hungry again? We go to the kitchen, get out those faded cool whip containers out of the dishwasher, make a turkey sandwich with cranberries and stuffing on a King's Hawaiian sweet roll, and eat again. Then we throw a slice of pumpkin pie on top of that.

It is true, even on Thanksgiving Day, we get hungry again.

But in our Gospel for today from John 6, the bread of life chapter, Jesus proclaims, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Never hungry or thirsty again? Coming to Jesus and believing in him satisfies our deepest hungers... spiritual hunger.

Jesus tells his disciples, who just partook in the feeding of 5000, that he is much more than food ATM. Jesus says, the bread that I give will endure for eternal life. And they say, "sir give us this bread always." They were thinking physical bread. But Jesus was talking spiritual bread.

Recall at that meal, Jesus fed at least 5000 people with a boy's gift of 5 barley loaves and 2 fish. This boy's gift of giving his best to Jesus sparked a miracle. Jesus took these gifts and gave thanks. And in John's Gospel, Jesus fed each person individually. Meaning Jesus truly desires a one to one relationship with each of us. All were satisfied and the disciples gathered up 12 baskets of leftovers. God gives just enough and a little left over.

The disciples and the crowd only heard of such large scale feedings when God gave manna in the wilderness. But this bread fed them for a day. Jesus says, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." And the bread the bread that Jesus is himself. His flesh. Today we receive this bread in the word and sacrament for forgiveness of our sins and food for the faith journey.

How can we not be thankful, that we have a God who desires abundant and eternal life for all of us? For the world!

I will end with a prayer from Diana Butler Bass from her book “Grateful: The transformative power of giving thanks”.

Amen