

Message #1035  
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"THANKSGIVING"  
{Psalm 100}

Trinity Presbyterian Church and GKI Indonesia Presbyterian Church  
Saturday, November 22, 2003

#### INTRODUCTION

Tonight we're blending together two cultures and two traditions. I look forward to the Thanksgiving feast we are soon to experience together...a meal featuring your wonderful Indonesian delicacies.

Tonight we gather to give thanks to God. I like so much the scripture lesson read earlier...

"I will thank the Lord with all my heart, as I meet with His Godly people. How amazing are the deeds of the Lord!" {Psalm 111:1}

The Psalmist also wrote...

"Enter His gates with thanksgiving; go into His courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless His name. For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and His faithfulness continues to each generation." {Psalm 100:4-5}

#### THANKSGIVING IN AMERICA

It's only five days until Thanksgiving now--a great American holiday. It's a time when we gather together with family and/or with friends if we're far from home. Traditionally there's lots of good food...and a time for counting our blessings...and a day to give thanks.

For the last several years when it comes time for the blessing of the food in our home on Thanksgiving, our family holds hands and each person says a brief prayer beginning with the words, "I'm thankful for...!" It's always such a wonderful experience to hear everyone give thanks for something special--from my grandchildren to my mother.

I so love the words of that gospel song...

"Count your many blessings, name them one by one; count your blessings, see what God has done. Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your many blessings, see what God has done." {Johnson Oatman, Jr.}

But, what is Thanksgiving all about? How did this holiday come to be in America?

Thanksgiving is more than turkey and stuffing...

...cranberries and pumpkin pie

...mashed potatoes, gravy...and candied yams

Thanksgiving is more than sitting in front of the TV watching yet another football game or Macy's Santa Claus Parade.

Thanksgiving emerged out of a backdrop of extreme pain and suffering...a time when people were genuinely grateful to God for their very lives...and they took time to give thanks!

I believe, therefore, that Thanksgiving ought to be the most robust of holidays.

Our celebration tonight...and again on Thursday {Thanksgiving Day}...should be seen in terms of the miracle of survival and the grandeur of the human spirit in the face of incalculable odds.

...Thanksgiving should be a time of awe for staggering sacrifices made...

...for brave dreams

...it took blood, sweat, and tears of many to make our country the great land that it

has become to be  
...it cost many their lives  
...that is why we give thanks as a nation!

#### HISTORY OF THE HOLIDAY

Let me take you back to the beginning for a few minutes.

More than half of the 100 plus pilgrims who arrived on our eastern shores on the Mayflower in November of 1620 were dead by the first Thanksgiving a year later!

One survivor wrote...

"The great sickness {probably a combination of scurvy from the ocean crossing, typhus, and pneumonia} took the lives of 22 of the 38 adult males--leaving only 16; 16 of the adult women--leaving only 11."

Here's how Governor Bradford told it--

"So they died sometimes 2 or 3 a day, and of 100 and odd persons, scarce 50 remained. And of these, in the time of most distress, there was but 6 or 7 sound persons who, to their great commendations be it spoke, spared no pains, night or day, but with abundance of toil and hazard of their own health, fetched them woods, made them fires, dressed their meat, washed their loathsome clothes, clothed and unclothed them--in a word, did all the homely and necessary offices for them which dainty and queasy stomachs cannot endure here to be named."

Bradford also makes it clear that without the help of the local Wampanoag Indians, the pilgrims would never have made the first Thanksgiving. They generously shared food with the English settlers during the first winter and then showed them how to plant and cultivate corn the next spring and summer.

Fortunately the first harvest was a generous one.

...a three day feast was planned in late November

...the pilgrims invited the Indian chief Massasoit and his people

...90 Wampanoags arrived with 5 deer to eat.

...the Englishmen supplied the meal with wild turkeys they had shot

Can you imagine the mix of emotions that must've been present on that first Thanksgiving?

...it had been a terribly traumatic year for them

...they had lost much...yet, they gathered to give thanks!

Bradford wrote in his history of that first Thanksgiving...

"Although it may not always be so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish others partake of our plenty!"

...isn't that an incredible statement?

..."we often wish others partake of our plenty!"

...the best way to give thanks is to give!

#### THANKSGIVING IS STILL A DAY TO PAUSE AND GIVE THANKS

Many cultures have come to North America inspired by the words of our Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor...

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breath free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

We gather tonight...and again in five days...to give thanks and celebrate a great feast together.

In 1777 the first Thanksgiving of the new United States of America occurred when General George Washington and his army stopped in the bitter weather in the open fields on their way to Valley Forge to mark the occasion.

Twelve years later, Washington's first proclamation after his inauguration as our nation's first president was to declare November 26, 1789 as a national day of

"thanksgiving and prayer!"

In 1863, it was our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln, who made this a national holiday...and it is now celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November each year.

#### CONCLUSION

In our gathering tonight...and next Thursday...to continue this great tradition. Let's start by actually counting our blessings--naming them one by one...acknowledging what God has done!

...let's give thanks as those first Pilgrims did 382 years ago this month...

...thanks be to God!

...they had the fruits of the earth to eat...as do we...

...thanks be to God!

...the weather was still good...as it is now for us...

...thanks be to God!

...they shared a sense of community with those of other cultures...as do we tonight...

...thanks be to God!

...and how many other blessings will we be able to give thanks for during this season of the year?

...thanks be to God!

Let us thank God...

...for our loving families

...for our health

...for our freedom to worship

...for our homes

...for a God who loves us

...who saves us by His grace and His mercy.

"Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices. Who wondrous things has done, in whom His world rejoices; who, from our mothers' arms, has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today."