

VOC Thanksgiving, 2015

The Best Thanksgiving

*What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will lift up
the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord*

Psalm 116: 12, 13

Monday, October 12, we can celebrate another Thanksgiving. Actually Canadians had many different Thanksgiving celebrations before the official date was chosen by Parliament in 1957. A long time before pioneers came to this country First Nations celebrated the gathering of their crops. Later thanksgiving celebrations were held to commemorate the successful crossing of the Northwest passage by Martin Frobisher in 1558. Then too there was thanksgiving for victories in battles as well as the recovery of the Prince of Wales from a serious illness in 1872.

The Canadian history of Thanksgiving has little or nothing to do with pilgrims coming over on the Mayflower, they who landed at Plymouth Rock in present day Massachusetts in 1620. However, we may say the tradition of having a feast, such as is common in our celebrations of Thanksgiving is shared with our neighbours to the south. It was in the fall of 1621 that the pilgrims there shared a harvest feast with the Pokanoketsa nation of natives also called the Wampanoag.

At Thanksgiving we too must be grateful for the bounty the Lord God gives us in this Canada of ours. We are the envy of many other nations. While it is estimated some 80% of all the people in the world do not have enough to eat, yet extreme hunger and malnutrition due to economic hardships is foreign to many of us. That's not to say there is no poverty and no necessity for food banks in Canada for there

certainly is. Only, because we have so many good things and such plenty of food we're often called on to help less fortunate nations. Someone has written:

For us the rains descend; for us the sun sheds abroad its creative beams; the mountains rise, the valleys bloom, the prairies shimmer with golden wheat, and the sea opens its bosom to admit our commerce. ¹

This while in not a few places, endless lines of emaciated people, often with very young children, line up day after day to receive a drink of water and a bowl of something to eat.

So we set this one day in fall of every year apart for national thanksgiving. The question is, *Do we give thanks to God for the bounty He provides?* Do we then worship him and pray and sing his praises there where he gathers his people? Or are we so stuck into our turkeys, and our Thanksgiving Day football games and our patio parties that we forget to offer him the thanks he is due?

Many, many years ago there was someone who enjoyed the blessings of God in great abundance. The more he thought of all the good things God had provided the more grateful he felt toward God.

Yet he came to the conclusion that all the established channels for thanksgiving were rurally inadequate. They were simply too small. So what did he do? He cried out, "*What shall I render, or what shall I give to the Lord for all his benefits to me?*" The answer came to him and he said, "*I will lift up (or as we could also read, "I will take") the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.*"

¹ the late Rev. Peter Eldersveld in a message on the Back to God Hour, 1960.

Sounds rather strange doesn't it? Here's a person who gives thanks to the Lord, by doing what? By **taking** something from him, namely the "*cup of salvation.*"

Do you think that "cup of salvation is really a fine gift? Yes, absolutely! It cost the Lord God a great deal/ For that cup is full of the saving power of Jesus' blood! No doubt about it, the treasures of this earth are great: bountiful crops, beautiful sunshine, the colors of fall. Besides, there is the gift of good health, the prospect of another successful year at school and so much more. They're all special gifts.

And yet.... that cup of salvation of which the psalmist spoke, is priceless! God the Father surrendered his Son, Jesus Christ in order to give us that cup. The bible says, " *...Though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor...*" (2 Corinthians 8: 9).

How could we possibly refuse this cup of salvation? It would mean we refuse the gift of life itself. Does it really make sense to celebrate Thanksgiving Day and eat our turkeys and smack our lips,....but.... reject the treasure of God's Son?

The bible is clear, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*" (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4: 3, 4).

That Word is sure and it is powerful, gracious and life-preserving. The author who wrote Psalm 116 knew it and had confidence in it. He knew he had every reason to give thanks to God for he knew that his life was safe with the Lord. Did he go through a very difficult time? Yes, for he said that even the "*snare of death*" surrounded him. (v. 3)

But then he prayed to the Lord, he cried out to him, “ *O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul.*” (v. 4)

And the Lord heard and did rescue him. In great thankfulness the psalmist lifted and looked to what he called “ *the cup of salvation.*” What did he do next? He vowed he would worship the Lord “ *In the presence of all his people*” (v. 18). He would go and make a sacrifice of thanksgiving in the house of the Lord.

May we do the same for all those who believe the supreme sacrifice of Christ’s own blood has been made have even greater reason to worship the Lord. To do so there where we are called, where Jesus Christ is gathering his church, his people.

Sad enough, there appear to be many that dismiss that obligation. In this post-Christian era there are many who have become atheists. Besides these there are also great crowds of those who may still confess to be Christians but who appear to be unconvinced of the necessity to offer God lives of thankfulness. For many Christian churches are left half-empty on any given Sunday.

In contrast, the casinos and the sports stadiums are maxed out and so are the golf courses and beaches in the summer.

How is it with your faith, dear listener? Are you busy with lifting up this precious “*cup of salvation*”? Do you treasure the Lord’s Supper table where the sacrifice of God’s Son is celebrated?

There are those who will still take Christ Jesus as a brave martyr for his principles but not as a sacrifice for their sins. Not a few will take him as an exemplary teacher of certain truths but not as the Saviour of their souls, their lives.

But then, it appears that for many life is no more than an uncertain merry-go-round. Somehow, somewhere, they got on it, and if they have any expectation it is that they might stay on it, even if they don't know where they are heading.

Yet that is not a secure, nor is it a happy way to be on one's life journey. We need to be prepared for this question, for it is one that God may very well ask us when we come to stand before Him. “ *What have you done with the cup of salvation, the blood of Christ, shed for sinners like you and me?*”

Your death and mine will only be “*precious*” if we belong to those the psalmist called “ *saints*”. No that's not some exclusive club of people who excel in leading super-special lives. “Saints” are simply rank-and-file Christians, who are sinners, like all of us, but who are saved, bought by the blood of Christ.

So then, take that cup and lift it up! Not just once on a special day like October 12. No, but every day of your life. That seeking the Lord you and I may progress, in faith, until that grand Thanksgiving Day , When peace and prosperity, joy everlasting is ushered in and all believers, together may celebrate it on a new earth. There to rejoice in life everlasting. For Christ's sake, Have a Blessed Thanksgiving!

Amen and thank you so much for listening

