

“The Weakness of Worry”
The Thanksgiving Spirit Series
Psalm 37:1-8, Matthew 6:25-34
November 15, 2020

This current Sermon Series that we’re in, titled: “The Thanksgiving Spirit” is a sequence of messages designed to prompt us to better “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.”

This series will come to a close a week from now, when we are on the cusp of Thanksgiving, the day when millions of families traditionally gather around a large golden-roasted turkey, which is surrounded by all the tasty trimmings we can muster.

This year, of course, will be different. There will be smaller in-person family gatherings, there will be family and friends dining “virtually,” or outdoors; and we’ll all muddle through, thanking God for the blessings we have received, even as we plead with the Lord for an end to this painful pandemic.

Ordinarily, it takes the skills of a gifted surgeon to dissect most of the big bird that is the centerpiece of the table. However, there is one (actually two) easily accessible portions that are often grabbed up first: the legs.

Those big, juicy, easy-to-pull-off turkey legs are especially tantalizing to kids.

After all, the leg comes with its own handle. The leg doesn't require a knife and fork. And the leg leftovers fit in just one zip-lock bag ready to go for a snack later.

No wonder so many Thanksgiving diners are leg grabbers.

But turkey legs aren't the only legs that attract little children.

One of my fondest memories is the way our children, when they were young, would run up to me and grab my legs when I got home from work.

Of course, a person needs to brace themselves for that kind of enthusiastic greeting. That was especially so when it came to our son Taft. Even as a two-year old he was so strong and solid that his “leg-grabs” were more like a tackle.

That's one reason it gave me so much joy one Thanksgiving family gathering to see him as a 6'4" adult, walking around the room with a niece and nephew more-or-less velcro-ed to each leg.

I imagine just about everyone who's been a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle to a young child has had the same experience.

Like honey bees drawn to nectar, all little kids seem to go through the leg-clinging, leg-riding stage.

To someone measuring under three feet, an adult's leg is a tall, straight column of strength. It's just the right circumference for small, short arms to go around and of course the attached foot provides a convenient seat for sitting.

Have you ever considered the tremendous sense of security and love involved in leg-grabbing and leg-riding?

It's a safe place where troubles are less daunting, fears less intimidating; and it's only accessible to kids of a certain size

When a child is riding on the leg of a loved one, they only feel the strength of our love.

They never notice our feet of clay.

But little ones tend to grow larger and heavier. Too-soon our legs aren't long enough, or strong enough to support them.

Is it possible that once we grow out of that stage we'll ever be able to feel that stability and security again?

Do you ever crave that absolute grounded-ness that we once gained as a leg-grabber?

Where can adults go to reconnect for a confidence boost?

What can we do to find a pillar of unshakeable love?

Who can we lean all our weight on?

Who is strong enough to carry all the weight of our fears, doubts, responsibilities, and failures?

Well, let's look to the Bible for the answers to those questions.

Jesus' message in today's gospel text is like a double-edged sword.

On one hand, he gets on to his disciples for behaving like someone who doesn't know what it's like to be part of a family guided by a generous patriarch who provides abundantly for his loved ones.

A person like that, Jesus says, worries about "what you will eat, or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear." (vss. 26, 30)

The thing is, Jesus' warning against worrying isn't based on a conviction that food, shelter, and clothing are not crucial to our survival. The reason why we shouldn't worry comes in the second half of His message.

The truth, Jesus proclaims, is that "your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." (vs. 32)

Jesus challenges His followers "of little faith", that **IF** the God who created and cares for the birds of the air (vs. 26) and the grass of the field (vs. 30) has so much concern on the simplest life forms of His Creation, "won't God do much more than that for you?" (vs. 30)

Jesus insists that his disciples not only stop worrying about their lives, but that they should have complete confidence in God's ever-present, ever-sustaining love and concern for all God's children.

Jesus then reminds his listeners, that God created ALL things and ALL people with divine intentionality.

Each living thing, each animal, plant, fish should have what it needs to survive, whether that's: fur or feathers, talons or teeth. God has provided for each creature.

Jesus is making the point in this lesson that all living things or creatures are living proof that God provides for every need.

And then our Savior asks a rhetorical question: “Humankind is made in God’s own image. Don’t you think that your Creator will take care of you even more than He takes care of the birds and flowers?”

The thing is, Jesus absolutely cannot stand the idea that ANYONE who follows Him would live a fretful, fearful existence.

There's nothing we can experience on this earth that can knock us down or out as long as we grab on to the assurance of God's love.

God wants us to be leg grabbing children.

Believe me, when we run to the Lord, and grab ahold of His unshakeable love, God will not recoil.

He will not bend, break, shake, veer, swerve, or EVER take back His promises.

I have to confess that one day this past week I had to be reminded of God’s desire and ability to lead us through the challenges we face.

It was one of those mornings that as soon as I woke up, my mind was flooded by all the things I “NEED” to accomplish.

I was facing a day that had a number of pressing things on my “To Do” list. My long list was compounded by the surprise flat tire I noticed on my car after our evening walk the night before.

I knew that I had a lot on my plate that morning, and I wasn’t going anywhere fast.

SO, I did what any “control freak” does.

I got grumpy.

I decided that before I got off the rails any further I’d better go read my “Jesus Calling” Daily Devotional, which is often quite timely.

It got right to the point on November 11th. Get this:

“Your tendency upon awakening is to assess the difficulties ahead of you, measuring them against your average strength. This is an exercise in unreality.”

God is always on time, Amen?

In the Devotional, Jesus went on to say:

“The degree to which I strengthen you on a given day is based mainly on two variables: the difficulty of your circumstances, and your willingness to depend on Me for help. Try to view challenging days as opportunities to receive more of My power than usual.”

You talk about an attitude adjustment! With Jesus at my side I knew that I could take on the day. And I did.

He says to you and me: “Look to Me for all that you need, and watch to see what I will do.”

No matter how big we get, no matter how old we are . . . His are the only legs that can support us and carry us.

Instead of those fragile feet of clay our own children must settle for as a temporary resting place, God's legs grow out of a foundation made of solid rock.

At the base of God's pillar of love is that cornerstone that so many people have rejected.

His name is Jesus.

We have the person of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit to steady us as we cling to God's love and swing confidently through life.

If you're a leg-grabbing Christian, you aren't filling your hours and hearts with nagging fears about how you are going to make it in this tough, competitive world.

But that doesn't mean leg-grabbing Christians don't have to work hard.

I don't quote famous theologians very often, but I'd like to share something with you today that Karl Barth wrote.

I think it applies to the reason why we should have a “Spirit of Thanksgiving.”

According to Barth: “Gratitude follows grace like thunder follows lightning.”

It’s true, you know.

Jesus' gift of redemption erases our daunting, haunting need to earn our way to salvation through works of righteousness, through good works.

But Jesus does call Christians to the greatest challenge.

We're called to come and participate in the most righteous work anyone can be involved in.

We are called to commit our lives to God and “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” (vs. 33)

Jesus calls you and me to undertake His works, what truly works, in our lives.

There isn’t anything lackadaisical or lazy about a disciple who abandons worrying about things (food, shelter, clothing, even the duration of our own lives) in order to focus their energies and talents on those righteous works that advance the kingdom.

Righteous work seldom brings in the big bucks.

Righteous work may not bring us a life made easier thru worldly wealth.

But you can take this to the bank: People who “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness” are rich in many ways that the world cannot measure.

When we make righteous work our priority, it will always sustain us and keep us strong enough to serve.

As we approach Thanksgiving, I urge you to become a leg-grabbing Christian this year.

Grab onto God's legs, to those pillars of love, forgiveness, and redemption.

The Good News is that you should be prepared for the ride of your life...while you're hugging God's legs.