

We have just a few days until Thanksgiving, and what is on our minds is probably not a theological discourse in the Reign of Christ. So, I won't do that! We're thinking about other things; traditions which we may have to forego this year. We won't have an Interfaith Thanksgiving service this year, sad to say. One of the hymns we often sing at that service is an oldie but goodie, "We Gather together to ask the Lord's blessing."

2. Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining,
Ordaining, maintaining His kingdom divine;
So from the beginning the fight we were winning;
Thou, Lord, were at our side, all glory be Thine! (Hymn 433 TH 1982 Public Domain)

We have always called this last Sunday in the Church year, Christ the King Sunday. And even as we praise God as our leader triumphant, there are other immediate things on our minds.

First and foremost, what will Thanksgiving be like this year? Will we be eating alone? And if so, how will that feel? Will the current Covid wave, our third of the year be dying down by the time Christmas comes around? Gosh, I pray that it will. And how safe will the coming vaccine be? Or, how soon can I get it? These are the things that are on our minds.

And yet prayer and praise to our God who guides us, is a comfort despite all the uncertainty. God alone knows the answer to these questions. And God will see us through all of this.

For thirteen years now, our own Bev Becker has been heading up the Thanksgiving Dinner Celebration at the Pilgrim House in Canaan. She shops, she organizes, she arranges for the volunteer cooks, and gets the turkeys. Usually she asks the kids at Canaan Elementary to make placemats and other decorations. We'll miss those this year. Every year many of us help with peeling vegetables on Wednesday, serving and doing dishes on Thursday, Thanksgiving day, when well over a hundred people are welcomed to Pilgrim House.

"What are you going to DO this year?" I asked Bev a month ago or so. "Oh, we'll still have the dinner, she replied. Of course. Neither rain or snow (we've had both through the years) nor a pandemic will stop a safe Thanksgiving Celebration at the Pilgrim House this year!

This year the meal will be a take-out affair and I think my assignment is to be a runner...between the kitchen and the sidewalk. My grandson, Jacob and his mom Amy have said they'll lend a hand too.

Usually each year before the dinner starts Pastor Savage Frieze and I hold hands with all those working in the kitchen and those who have arrived early for dinner – yikes! 25 people holding hands in a circle!? That sounds bizarre now! And we offer a prayer of gratitude for all the blessings of our lives.

This year Savage won't be attending but I wrote to him and asked if he and I could collaborate on a prayer for the day. My idea was that we could print it on slips of paper, attach them to the to-go containers and that way people could feel the love that we wish we could share in person as we eat our Thanksgiving dinner. Whether we are alone or with close family and housemates, and whatever we are eating, we'll all be praying to God.

Our passage from Hebrew Scripture this morning, from the prophecy of Ezekiel assures us that God is our shepherd and our salvation:

"I will rescue [the sheep] (that's us) from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness...(It's threat of danger that scatters us)... I will feed them on the mountains and by the watercourses. ... I will feed them with good pasture and they shall lie down in good grazing land." Ezekiel 34:11, 14-15)

Sheep lie down when they are feeling safe, well fed and watered. Sheep are prey animals and so normally are at high alert looking for predators. If they lie down, it's because they feel at peace and don't sense danger. God feeds us. God protects us.

Our passage from Matthew is the last one we'll hear from this Gospel for a few years, it reminds us that the Sovereign of our lives is also the Master of the Day of Judgement. God will separate sheep from the goats. It is God's job, not ours, to judge. Our job, or "call" if you will, is to just keep doing the next right thing in life and not worry about how we are doing in comparison to our neighbor to the left or to the right.

If we're doing our job properly in life then we won't even realize if we are helping to feed, clothe or visit whether that person is a friend, a foe or Christ himself. "When was it, Lord?" Matthew has had lots to say to the disciples about our need to have faith, humility and integrity. We must be ready to see Christ in all around us and be ready to forgive, to be generous and love one another.

So, this King, our Christ, is not like the Kings of old. Christ is not a king who enslaves us, forcing anyone to do whatever he commands. Our Christ who we worship, and praise, gives us freedom, courage and faith.

We are God's people. We are the sheep of God's pasture. We are the beloved ones who are fed, who care about our fellows, who work together as a flock. Jesus will be at our Thanksgiving tables wherever they are and no matter how many, or how few, are sitting at the table, and whether we notice or not. The Holy Spirit unites us. So, "cease from distressing. Sing praises to his name, God forgets not his own.