

FROM THE PASTOR

It's every year.

Every year the parades. Every year the football games, every year the big family get-togethers. Every year the kids are home from school, and banks and stores and businesses of all kinds take the day off. Every year there are favorite foods and second helpings and third helpings and so many helpings that you have to loosen your belt and lay down and take a nap on the floor. We celebrate Thanksgiving Day every year since President Lincoln declared that a national Day of Thanksgiving would be celebrated annually.

So here we are, celebrating a national holiday, a day of overeating and television watching and catching up with the relatives. Here we are celebrating this holiday in church. You have to wonder why. It's not in the Bible. Jesus and the disciples didn't sit around a long table and eat yams and canned cranberry sauce every fall. It's not part of the ancient tradition of the church, either. Thanksgiving is not a religious celebration. It's a national holiday.

Nevertheless, Thanksgiving is still a day set aside for giving thanks. But, why? Just to whom exactly, are we giving thanks? You give thanks to someone, right? Kids are taught to be polite and respectful. We teach them to say, "Please" when they ask for something, and to say, "Thank you" when they get it. But you can still get a gift and use that gift and love that gift without ever saying, "Thank you." But giving thanks isn't about the gift. Giving thanks is about the giver. You say, "Thank you" to someone. Saying, "Thank you" acknowledges that there is another person involved. Giving thanks establishes a relationship. If we as an entire nation are giving thanks on a certain day, then somewhere wrapped up in all of it is the question of just whom we are thanking. On that well-known first Thanksgiving celebration in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the autumn of 1621, there was no question whatsoever as to whom they were thanking. They were thanking God. It was a day and a feast set aside for the express purpose of thanking God. The colony was new, and survival was anything but certain. Colonial settlements had collapsed or given up or just plain vanished before. But the harvest had been a good one in 1621. The colonists had learned to adapt to the climate of their new home. They were in good shape, with enough shelter and enough food to survive the harsh New England winter. The colonists were Puritans, a conservative group of Christian believers. God had clearly blessed them, and they knew it. They had been taken care of and given gifts, so they gave thanks. However, in 1622 there wasn't any thanksgiving celebration! In that year, the harvest was not so good so the colonists were going into the winter with more fear and a lot less security. The Puritans had concluded that God had not chosen to bless them that year, and so a feast of Thanksgiving would not have been in order. To the Puritans, Thanksgiving was not an automatic celebration that happened year in and year out no matter what. They gave thanks in times of plenty. They repented in times of want.

But, unlike the Puritans, we do celebrate Thanksgiving annually. But again, that raises the question of: If we are thankful every year, right on schedule, then just what is it that we are giving thanks for? Sometimes, not every year is a good year. Sometimes things are going great for ourselves, our families, and our nation. Sometimes there is health and happiness everywhere you look. Sometimes there is peace and plenty. ...Sometimes... but not always. There are other times when war and want dominate our thoughts, our days, and our headlines. There are times when our lives are filled with sickness and worry, dysfunction and anxiety. But, no matter what, even in the middle of the most difficult of times, there are always going to be blessings. We can say with 100% certainty that we will always have blessings to count because we know what those blessings are. The blessing that Jesus Christ died for us. The blessing that Jesus Christ rose to give us life. That Jesus loves us. That Jesus forgives us. That was true last year and it will be true next year and the year after that and the year after that. The blessing that in Jesus Christ, there is always mercy. That there always is life. That with God we are never alone. We have a future and a purpose with God.

The blessed assurance that with Jesus Christ there is always hope! Whether we have a lot or just a little, we will always have Jesus. Whether our hearts are joyful or our hearts are breaking, God always loves us. So, my family in the faith, give thanks with your words. Give thanks with your time. Give thanks with your financial resources. Give thanks with your thoughts and your emotions. And remember that every year and every day and every minute, we all have so many reasons to give thanks!

See you in church!

Pastor Fogle