**Creation 3: Be Grateful for Me. (Joel 2:21-24)**

Growing up in England, I never heard the term Thanksgiving as a child. Sure, we would have a time called ‘Harvest Festival’ when we would celebrate the harvests of the fields. I always remember being in school assemblies and fond memories of singing *We Plough The Fields and Scatter –* which is probably why I still like this hymn.

At Harvest Festival, I also remember my childhood church being decorated – much like this one. (Thank you to the team that did this!)

I remember we would have baskets of fruit and vegetables at the front; and during the service the children would all bring up some canned goods and homemade jams to the alter – after church the children would pack all the collected goods into baskets and we’d take them to those in need in the neighborhood.

I remember Harvest Festival as a time of giving and generosity.

But I don’t think I really reflected on the gratitude part of Harvest Festival, until I came to Canada and began to use the term ‘Thanksgiving.’

And this made me begin to wonder – why, when they arrived in this land, did our early ancestors change the term from Harvest Festival to Thanksgiving?

Well, I’m no historian, but a quick google research tells me that when the Pilgrims introduced this festival in early 1600’s – they were fleeing to this land seeking safety from religious persecution. In a way, they were the first refugees.

And when they first arrived – their fields were not full of bountiful crops like they had been back home.

Times were very hard for them – very hard!

But they did have enough food to live; they did have shelter; and they did have freedom – and for that they were ‘Thankful’ to God.

In our scripture reading today Joel is speaking to a people who had forgotten how to worship and give thanks to God. In the passage just before the one that Elisha read to us – Joel warns the people that they will experience a devastating locust infestation, a destruction of all their crops, a raging fire, and a deathly army – he warns them that nothing will be saved. Then he gives them a ‘but’ clause – like a get out of jail free card! He tells them that if they just “*return to God with all their heart”*(2:12)then, the land before them will be “*like the garden of Eden”* (Joel 2:3).

And just incase they don’t remember what the garden of Eden is like, Joel describes it to them in the passage that we heard read to us. We hear that:

*Pastures will become green (v 22); trees will bear fruit (v 22); fig trees and vines will yield plenty of riches (v22); threshing floors will be filled with grain;(v24)* and the *vats will overflow with new wine and oil.(24)*

Wow – that is a description of description of plenty!

And what must the people do to secure this vision – well it’s simple! Joel tells them “*to be glad and rejoice” (v 21)*

To be glad and rejoice

In other words – be thankful!

I think that’s what the early Pilgrims realized. They knew that they needed to be thankful to God despite how hard things were for them:

* Despite the number of them that died from scurvy and pneumonia on the journey over
* Despite their lack of shelter in the cold wet weather
* Despite the spread of small pox among their community

Still – they remembered to give thanks to God and to be filled with gratitude. Perhaps that is why they changed the term from Harvest Festival to ‘Thanksgiving.’

Like the people of Zion, they were to be *glad and rejoice*!

Do we stop to give thanks. To be glad and rejoice?

I know that on this day of Thanksgiving we might pause and say or sing a prayer of Grace around the table; or we might go around the table and each say something what we are thankful for – and that is a good tradition.

But, do we do that every day?

Because it is not just on Thanksgiving that God blesses us – it is every day!

Sometimes I know it can be hard to see things as a blessing. Just like the people of Zion, and like the early pilgrims, it can be hard to look past times of difficulties. Living through a pandemic is perhaps such a time for us in this day and age.

But even in these difficult and uncertain times, we are still called to rejoice and be glad.

We are called to be thankful for the gifts that God gives us.

And I don’t just mean only the gifts of the bounties of the harvests, or the gifts of our homes, and our families and our friends.

Yes, it is good to give thank for all those things.

But, I think we are also called to give thanks for the gifts of our interior fields and gardens.

The seeds that God plants in each of our hearts, and that grow into the fruits of the Spirit:

 *Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faithfulness, and Self-Control.*

God is the sower of these seeds that are planted in our hearts. All of us.

On our journeys of faith and life, we are each given experiences that help these seeds grow and ripen, and for that we can ‘*rejoice and be glad.’*

And so today – as Bev quietly plays –I invite you on this Thanksgiving to take a moment to reflect on those internal gifts that God has planted in your heart.

Perhaps there is one that particularly stands out to you.

Think about how the seed has ripened and grown in you since the last harvest time.

Maybe it was a specific situation that led to this maturity and growth.

And as you recall that moment, that experience, that part of your faith journey – take a moment to silently give thanks to God – the great sower of seeds.

(music and reflection)

God is good. *Let us give thanks and rejoice!*

Under different conditions, I would invite you each to come forward and place a fruit, or grain, or vegetable of your choice on our table, as a representation of the many different gifts that God gives us.

Sadly we can’t do that, but I do encourage you to later share your reflections with your family or friends – perhaps as you gather around a Thanksgiving table.

For now, as a family of one community of faith – here or at home – let us all give thanks to God as we come together in prayer.

Please join me in our call to prayer, taken from MV 187: We give our Thanks to God.