

## **THANKSGIVING—GRATITUDE**

Sometimes it's easier to get to Thanksgiving Dinner than it is to get to the Gratitude. We are all flawed human beings, but it is often easier to see the flaws in somebody else than it is to see them in the mirror. The holidays may bring out the best in people, but they also may bring out the worst. If people who have hurt or abused us are also family members, we may be expected to see them over the holidays, and that can be really hard. If there are such people somewhere in our family, it may make family gatherings more a painful obligation than a joy, making it even harder to get to the gratitude. In a year of dashed hopes and expectations, it also may be hard to spend time with family, knowing that we may have to rehash political battles. There are certainly challenges posed by many of the gatherings of family that we may face in the next few days and weeks. There is also a lot of good stuff that comes from family gatherings and taking the time to be with people who have been and often are our best friends and confidantes and the people who have to accept us even flawed as we may be.

The myth of Thanksgiving is that the Pilgrims and the Indians shared a feast back at the end of the harvest at least once in the earliest years of settlement. Those undocumented immigrants from Europe joined the invasion of the Americas about 1620 after the first European discovered the Americas in 1492, claiming them under the Doctrine of Discovery in which the Pope had decreed that good Christians could claim title of any and all lands under control of non-Christian peoples. The legend is that the Pilgrims and the Indians made peace and worked together to store food for the winter, celebrating a successful harvest at Thanksgiving. The native people could hardly have foreseen that they would soon lose their lands and lives to these immigrants that needed so much instruction in how to deal with life in what would become the United States. The Myth and Legend are much nicer than what many believe to be the realities of the white European Christian conquest of the Americas, but Thanksgiving remains one of the powerfully symbolic holidays of our nation, which along with the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is at least in theory secular and inclusive.

This morning we commemorate the holiday of Thanksgiving with a sharing of Gratitude, giving thanks for the many blessings of our lives. After the sermon, I will give you a chance to share a few of the things for which you are grateful.

We celebrate that we have the freedom to elect whomever we choose for our representatives in the government of this community, state, and nation. We also celebrate that we have the right to totally ignore the election and let whatever happens happen. We have the freedom to express our knowledge and wisdom, or not. We have the freedom to believe as true news what we hear on FOX or read on the internet on Facebook. We believe in free and open elections conducted by all those who bother to care. And we reserve the right to protest by voting for Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, or whoever else we had no idea could actually win. This is the American Way and we will fight to protect those rights all the way to the border of whatever country we decide to move to. Over the years, I have come to believe more and more that we really should have followed Ben Franklin's recommendation to make the Turkey the national bird, so much more fitting in so many ways than that white headed overgrown collector of roadkill. But, I digress!

Today we celebrate the blessings that we enjoy as we express our gratitude for family, friends, good food, freedom (at least for some), and the life that we experience. White folks and oil companies may still be taking away the rights of Native Peoples and endangering the drinking water for millions even here in the United States, but the Dakotas are pretty boring anyway! It may be harder for Mexicans and Muslims to enter the country in the next few years and social programs and health insurance may be harder to find. I guess I am finding Thanksgiving this year to be a mixture of blessings and challenges.

I expect to have a good Thanksgiving with my kids and grandkids. My first ex-wife is hosting, and we are at least civil with all the battles over child custody long past if not entirely forgotten. My second ex-wife is on her way west, but probably will not make it for Thanksgiving. My son has gotten a new job that will take him to Southeastern Arizona, and my step-daughter and her husband have just moved to a bigger house from near Santa Monica to near Long Beach so they will have room for Jane to join them part of the year. I am looking forward to seeing my kids and especially my youngest grandson, Lucas.

For a few days, I expect to just enjoy family, and maybe catch a football game, though there may also be a few discussions of how the new political climate will affect family and friends. For most of us, the impact of the new political landscape will be limited anyway. There are many checks and balances built into our system of governance, and though getting to some good things can be frustratingly slow, it also will take time to undo much of the progress made in the Obama years. By the time that many of the changes promised by Trump could take effect, he might already be on his way out of office. The role of President is also limited, though a Republican Congress might support things that the Democrats will be unable to block. For those of us political liberals and progressives, we certainly can celebrate the integrity and accomplishments of President Barack Obama.

I am grateful to have experienced wilderness in a world which has less wilderness each year. I have experienced few hardships in my lifetime when compared with so many people in this country and around the world. As I look ahead to the futures of my children and grandchildren, I can see that they are likely to face even more challenges than I have known. Even so, I am grateful for the chances that they will have to shape a better world.

I am grateful for most of the animals I have seen and known, both the ones that have shared my home and the ones I have seen in the wild or in zoos and wildlife parks. (Not so much for the mice and rats that leave messes in annoying places). I particularly have enjoyed seeing Bison, Deer, Elk, Moose, and Bear in forests and National Parks and I hope that they and so many other interesting animals will be around for my grandchildren and future generations to enjoy.

I am grateful for the flowers and trees and bushes that make my yard and park landscapes and the wilderness so much more interesting. I hope that we will not lose too much of the amazing diversity even with coming climactic changes.

I also am grateful for the fishes and aquatic mammals that make waterways, lakes, and oceans more interesting. I am grateful too for the birds and the bats, creatures in so many shapes and colors and sizes.

I am grateful for the diversity of people from many lands. I am grateful to live in an interesting world with variety, diversity, and surprises! When I list all the things for which I am grateful, the list is almost endless. There are so many good things about my life and our world! There are so many amazing people who have touched my life! There is so much that I can celebrate even in a difficult and challenging time! Not least of which, is that the Cubs finally won the World Series! Is it too much to ask that the Bears get a few more wins?

As we celebrate Thanksgiving, I hope that we take time to think about those who are not as fortunate as we are. I hope that we give thought to those in need during the holidays, supporting those programs and agencies that seek to care for those in need with food, groceries, winter clothing and shelter. I dream that we may somehow continue to make progress toward equality for all people with justice and fairness in employment and compensation. I pray that the apparent setback of the recent election may be balanced by the commitment of people of good will to bring justice with compassion to all persons in our nation and around the world. I am grateful for the words of Thomas Jefferson and the founders in their commitment to the ideals of liberty, justice, and freedom! Even in these difficult times, I am grateful to be an American!

I am grateful for Unitarian Universalism, and this congregation, and the opportunity to work with you for justice, peace, hope, and a healthier world!

And now it is your turn! What are you grateful for today?

Thank you each for sharing! Blessed Be and Happy Thanksgiving!