

“An Overflow of Thanksgiving!”
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Reflections for Thanksgiving Sunday

See readings at the start of each section

October 7, 2018

I

Giving thanks shifts us.

It shifts us from ourselves — what we have and don't have, who we are and are not. Gratitude shifts our attention to God, who gives what we have, who gives who we are, and gives abundantly.

Gratitude is itself God's gift.

Gratefulness frees us from our anxiousness — Do I have enough? Will I have enough? Am I enough? Gratefulness frees us to receive from God, easily and openly, and enjoy all that God gives. Gratefulness lets us enjoy God!

Gratefulness is itself God's gift.

Through the service we'll focus our gratitude on different things: our different harvests, our neighbours, each other. We'll take time to thank God for each of these. Finally, as we share in the Lord's Supper, we will celebrate with gratitude who God is.

As we move along, some of the activities we do each week we'll be doing in a different order, depending how they fit with these themes: harvests, neighbours, each other, and God.

Deuteronomy 26.1-10 (Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).)

II

“Thankful Off the Top”

Decades of being refugees were coming to an end. They were about to finally have their own homes, their own fields, their own shops and workplaces, their own places. They were entering into an abundance far beyond anything they had ever known.

When they had it, what were they to do?

Thank God!

Thank God by giving some of it away.

Not waiting to see what they might be able to spare. Not an afterthought. Not leftovers. Their gratitude and giving-away would come at the beginning, from the first of the harvest.

They would be thankful off the top.

Remember, God rescued you. When you could pay nothing, God paid everything for you. From the beginning, God's gifts have never been parcelled out, nor reserved for those who think they are deserving. God gives recklessly.

After we pray, we're going to share our financial offerings. Then, while we sing, "*Praise God for the Harvest*," you can bring and lay at the front anything that symbolizes the fruit of your labours and the joy of your thankfulness. (At the end of the service, you can retrieve them.)

Mark 12.28-31 (Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).)

III

"Neighbours with No Fixed Address"

That's Jesus' "Great Commandment," which is actually two: love God with all you are, love your neighbour as yourself. They are so closely intertwined, they become one. We'll get to the "loving God" part in a few minutes.

"Love your neighbour as yourself." Love them as though they were you.

That comes from the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Leviticus. It was nothing new. But what Jesus did with it! He took our notion of "neighbour" and stretched its arms wide. Remember his story of the Good Samaritan?

With Jesus, neighbours are not simply those with similar addresses. Who is your neighbour? Anyone who can use your help. No matter where they are or who they are. Act for them with love, as though they were you.

Let's pray for your neighbours, in your many neighbourhoods. I say "many neighbourhoods" because it's not just where you live. Your neighbourhoods are also where you work, learn, play, volunteer, spend time. Think of people in those places, and give thanks for them. God has placed you, so you can act for them with the love of Jesus.

John 13.1-2, 3-5, 12-15, 34-35. (Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).)

IV
Known By Love

Jesus' "Great Commandment" is to love God and love our neighbour. As we saw, neither of these is new, though what Jesus did with them is extraordinary.

Jesus did give a "New Commandment," and we just heard it. "Love each other." He is talking about love within his family.

We are siblings because Jesus brings us together

During "Last Supper" meal Jesus washed his family's feet. In that culture, this was a slave's job. Jesus chose to do it for family. And he told us that's what it means to love each other in this family.

We love by serving. As he has served us, we serve each other. We give ourselves for one another.

Beautiful! Except, we're talking about feet here. Back then, wearing sandals, travelling dusty and animal-trodden roads, feet were not so beautiful. Loving each other gets us into the stink.

Also, let me ask this. Did you choose your siblings? Do we get to pick our family members? It's the same in Jesus' family.

"Love each other." He commands that! It's the family rule. *"Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other."* It's from one another, whom we did not choose, that we learn how to love within the community of Jesus.

But it's not just those who we didn't choose to share these pews with here. *"Love each other,"* is for the whole family. In other churches. In other places. Around the world.

Let's give thanks for the whole family, our sisters and brothers in Christ here and everywhere.

Deuteronomy 6.4-9 (Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).)

V
All of You

Recognize how that begins? It's where Jesus learned the first part of his Great Commandment. Love your neighbour as though they were you. And Love God with all you are.

Love God with all your heart, your being, your strength.
That's you.
All of you.

Love God with all you have, with all you are. All of you.

Love God for Who God is, God and God only.
Love God because of what God has done, always and forever.

Don't stop talking about God.
Don't stop thinking about God.
Everywhere we go is God.

Love God, and give thanks.

The traditional communion prayer is called the 'Great Thanksgiving.' As we come to Jesus' table, give your thanksgiving to God.

VI Overflowing Thanksgiving

As I pour water into this glass, imagine that every drop stands for something you are thankful for.

We fill with thanksgiving.

The thing is, there is no limit on what God gives. God's abundance never runs out, never stops flowing. Such is God's love, God's creativity, God's grace and God's power.

Even when our cup is full, God continues to pour out. Our cup overflows.

And thanksgiving spills out from us.

As you go from this thanksgiving time, and this Thanksgiving weekend, continue to overflow with gratitude: for all your harvests, for all your neighbours, for each other, for God.¹

¹ I adapted this last part from a sermon by Rev. Trisha Elliott, "Let Thanksgiving Flow." It was included in an online worship resource to support the "Loving Our Neighbours" congregational giving program produced by the United Church for 2018-2019.