

North Kildonan United Church

11th October 2020 ~ *Rev. Don Johnson*

“Generosity”

Deuteronomy 8: 7-18

II Corinthians 9: 6-15

Luke 17: 11-19

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19:14)

It's safe to say that there are a significant number of differences between Canada and our neighbours to the South. For instance the history of Canada is certainly different from the United States. A quick glance at a calendar demonstrates that. Besides the obvious 4th of July verses Canada Day, Boxing Day is unknown in the States, as is a day off on Good Friday, just to mention a few. And because this is meant to be a festive service, a time to give special thanks, I won't make any mention of the radically different political systems that exist between our country and theirs. Other than to echo the refrain of so many of us these days, thank God we live in Canada!

Our celebration today is another example of how the two countries operate independently of each other. In Canada we mark Thanksgiving Day as the second Monday in October, with the focus of the day, officially, is on the Harvest, in all its forms. The American Thanksgiving Day, in late November, has quite a different emphasis and origin.

Our day is meant as an opportunity for the nation to rejoice in the bounty and the blessing which is Canadian agriculture. Many churches will celebrate the holiday in a variety of ways. They will decorate their sanctuaries with fresh fruit and vegetables, adorning the Communion Table with wonderful displays to remind us of the harvest. Carol has done an excellent job in preparing the display on our table this day, and we are so grateful for her efforts and artistic touch. Of course, in all other years, our sanctuaries would ring with the sound of singing, praising God through hymns and anthems, praising God for the great blessings of the wonders of creation and the bounties of the land and sea. We so eagerly look forward to the day when we are safe and free to sing in church again. Until that time, we are so grateful for the music Joan provides each service,

music that reminds us of our rich musical heritage,
music that so enriches our worship
and music that so blesses our souls.

During my years in Toronto, the church I served there would echo the book of Deuteronomy by having a jug of milk and a jar of honey on the Communion Table, symbolic of the promised good land. Hear again the promise from today's reading: *"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you."*

Sounds so much like the promise of Canada. So this day, while we give thanks for the promise of this land, we remember with gratitude all who care for this inheritance. We remember the farmer and the fisher, those who till the soil and seed the land then after much worry and work gather in the harvest, those who care for livestock, brave the sea waves, transport and prepare the harvest. It is good to have a day, a weekend, set aside to give thanks for the wonderful variety and quality of food our land and sea produces. A day to remember the long food chain that stretches back before we buy our packaged and prepared food at the store. To be grateful for all those who labour to produce food for us and for those beyond our borders, and to remember those labourers who come from other countries to help bring in the harvest, workers who in these pandemic times risk their health and their very lives for our sake.

Deuteronomy goes on to remind, well to warn, the people of Israel, and us as well, not to forget the One behind the gift of the harvest. It's easy for us to see the harvest as purely a human venture, to congratulate ourselves on our skill and ability and cleverness. We think of the systems of transportation and organization and marketing which bring us our food, and commend ourselves on how well it operates. Yet all we have has come about because of the wonderful cycle of nature devised and created by our loving God, a cycle we are interfering with at our peril through climate change.

The biblical story reminds the people of God that the harvest, the gifts of field and orchard, of birds and fish, that food, is meant to be shared and given generously to others in need.

Think of Paul's words to the Corinthians: *"the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

We often hear this text in Stewardship sermons, as an encouragement for the faithful to make a proper offering. While this is not meant to be a Stewardship sermon,

I would suggest to you that this year, of all years, we need to willingly and cheerfully and above all else, generously, increase our offerings so that our church can make it through these trying times.

When I had to come up with a title for this sermon, a task I always find a bit troublesome, partly because for the first 33 years of preaching I never used a sermon title, I came up with *Generosity*. Afterwards I thought I probably meant Gratitude, because that's the tone of the reading from Deuteronomy. But, on second thought, Generosity is the right title.

We are told in Deuteronomy and in the gospel reading to be grateful for what we have received. In Deuteronomy it is the Promised Land we have been reading about these past several Sundays. In the Gospel from Luke we hear of only one leper out of ten, a Samaritan, who gives thanks for being healed by Jesus. So gratitude is an important theme in both readings.

But so is generosity. These days perhaps more so.

We might actually say that *generosity is gratitude put into action*. We can be grateful for the blessings we have in our life and express that gratitude, which is often a dominant theme for Harvest Thanksgiving. And each of us might have our own list of what we are grateful for, a count your blessings tally that perhaps includes family and friends, a home and food on the table, a safe community and belonging to a faith community, health and happiness. These are indeed blessings, gifts that enrich and strengthen our daily living. Blessings for which we rightly give thanks to God.

But what might it look like if we were to take that tally of blessings and try to express them in terms of generosity. Say, for instance, to extend a generosity of spirit to our family and friends who are struggling, to be more available to their needs, more prepared to listen than give advice, more willing to forgive instead of trying to get even or prove a point. Or to put our appreciation of having a home and food on the table into action by supporting our outreach ministries or food banks. The list goes on and on of how we can express our gratitude by acts of generosity. And by being generous with our time, our attitude, our financial resources, our skills, our faith, we are offering thanks to God for all our blessings and extending God's love and care to those in need. I know we can't always achieve that, but we can at least try ... try to be generous and loving and forgiving and compassionate, knowing that we serve Christ when we serve our neighbour.

On this Harvest Thanksgiving day, in the midst of these trying times, let us give thanks for all the blessings we have, let us continue to be generous in our sharing of

our resources and of ourselves, and let us stay hopeful and strong in God's great love and grace.

And we end with these words by John Birch:

*May this eternal truth be always in our hearts,
That the God who breathed this world into being,
Placed stars into the heavens
And designed a butterfly's wing,
Is the God who entrusted his life
To the care of ordinary people,
Became vulnerable that we might know
How strong is the power of Love,
A mystery so deep it is impossible to grasp,
A mystery so beautiful it is impossible to ignore.*