

**Sermon Notes:** November 20, 2022

**Focus:** Thanksgiving

[Thanksgiving Readings](#)

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7).*

David Steindl-Rast is an expert in gratitude. He really seems like a happy monk. Years ago, I knew monks from different orders. Happy monkdom is not a default state. Monastic life has a magnificent structure for a life of prayer and thankfulness, but it is not magic. David has worked hard for the magic.

David points out in his TED talk that cultivating thankfulness is the road to a happy life (not the other way around). Happiness without thankfulness will pass like a warm summer day. Happiness rooted in gratitude can weather many storms. If you are grateful, peace will follow. Check out this TED talk

<https://youtu.be/UtBsl3joYRQ>

**Here is your thanksgiving week homework:**

- What are you grateful for?
- What has been the happiest moment of your life so far, what created that?
- What has been the hardest moment of your life, and how did you get through it with a degree of peacefulness?  
(This might be your secret to life if you pay attention to how you did it)
- What would you want the next generation to know about what you were most thankful for?

**Revisit these questions often.**

Grumpy? Do not force yourself to stop being grumpy. Count your blessings.

Scared? Thank the God who brought you to this day.

Mad? Remember that God is leading you (and all your enemies) to a homeland where everyone is welcome.

**Now, Scripture** Deuteronomy 26 focuses on first fruits (which is a way the Hebrews put gratitude first)

*you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name*

Can you ask God to help you give gratitude the seat of honor in your life? Gratitude leads to feelings. Feelings do not lead to gratitude, like David Steindl-Rast said early in my notes.

**First fruits thankfulness practice** The old and new testaments highlight the “festival of weeks” which is fifty days after Passover. God called worshipers to bring their first fruits — the best of their harvest— to God. It was concrete way to be grateful first. Pentecost (festival of weeks by another name) was deeply rooted in gratitude first. (pente=50 – 50 days after Passover). Early Christians took the Pentecost festival and reimagined it. The Holy Spirit was the first fruit and Christians spilled out on Jerusalem’s streets to share that gift with all people. Pentecost was outpouring of welcome. Because God loved them, they were to give the rest of their lives back to God. People flocked to those early followers of Jesus and the Spirit in part because of their magnetic gratitude.

(During my sermon, I will be making connections between  
Deuteronomy and the Gospel)

**My own Thanksgiving** As a kid, when I went to Henryetta, Oklahoma for 10 years of Thanksgivings. There you had to have seven essential elements - broccoli cheese casserole, a turkey (of course), stuffing from said turkey, pumpkin pie, cranberries with whipped cream & pecans frozen into a “pie”, green beans cooked in cream of mushroom soup (my least favorite), and of course football.

Later, when Kimberly and were dating, Thanksgiving was decidedly different. The whole meal was catered by Luby’s and served by paid staff. My first reaction was that it was “not real” because no one suffered for two days to pull it off. But even after the first Houston thanksgiving I was very thankful for their wide-open hearts and home. They always invite friends and acquaintances who would otherwise celebrate alone. Their door was open, not only on Thanksgiving but all year

Future thanksgivings in the Bryant world will not have broccoli cheese casserole, even if it is delicious. I find pumpkin pie gross, so if I am lucky enough to be a thanksgiving destination for my kids and grandkids, there will be no pie-- but there will be an open door above all else.

**Your thanksgiving** I suspect your elements are different, but I imagine your family would have a strong reaction if you deviated from the pre-scripted Thanksgiving meal. How can we look at how our own practices and family traditions to make thankfulness the baseline? May you strengthen whatever practices and traditions cultivate joy. You too can get rid of pumpkin pie, but do not stop pursuing gratitude. May God bless you with an experience full of peace, happiness, and joy on Thanksgiving all year.

**Our thanksgiving** God has and is sustaining us through our own political, economic, and emotional challenges. It is right and good for us to give our thanks back to God in Danville, at St. Timothy’s, and for our larger world. It is also right and good to remember everyone is welcome into the circle of friends on Thanksgiving Day, every day of the week, and in our Sunday celebrations.

Happy Thanksgiving, **Todd**