



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

November 30 2008

Advent 1 2008

When I first came to the states in 1983, my most favorite of the new holidays was by far Thanksgiving. Everything, apart from the convenience marts and a few gas stations were closed. Families and friends got together and shared a meal, turkey usually being the main meat of the day. I particularly enjoyed this because we always ate turkey at Christmas in England so thanksgiving was like Christmas without the presents. There was an amazing parade called Macys and I remember the commentators, songs and floats, that spoke of the spirit of Christmas and how it was the birth of Christ that was the reason for the celebration.

I was so in awe of this holiday that I wrote a poem one year that I have preached at all thanksgiving eve services except this past week.

We watched the parade on Thursday like we always do and was struck by how much has changed in 25 years. The statue of liberty was referred to as the lady of the harbor. The spirit of Christmas is now the belief in Santa Claus and this belief was talked of by many people and even sung about by many characters including Kermit the frog. What was blatantly missing was any reference to the birth of Christ.

You know, the first settlers, the originators of thanksgiving would be shocked to hear of no references to God or Christ at any thanksgiving celebration. On the Mayflower they drew up what was called the Mayflower Compact and was signed by most of the adult males and some of the male slaves.

It was very clear about who this journey and new life were in the name of. The compact begins –‘in the name of God amen’. It goes on to say that –‘having undertaken for the glory of god and advancement of the Christian faith’. Their faith in God and their faith in Christ were very clear and they made no bones about their belief and how they lived because of their belief.

On this advent Sunday, the beginning of 4 Sundays to prepare for the birth of Christ I believe that we are called to ask ourselves about our beliefs. What is it we believe and how do we live because of our beliefs.

The present cultural view of thanksgiving as the beginning of the Christmas season should remind us that we live in a society that for the most part is not concerned with god or Christ. A society that for the most part has allowed the word ‘holiday’ to be used instead of Christmas. A society that for the most part now displays teddy bears, snowmen and reindeer instead of nativity scenes. That has deemed the saying of merry Christmas to be offensive. That has put the measure on how good a holiday it has been by how much stuff you give or get and what this did for the economy.

25 years ago I thought of thanksgiving as a Christmas without the presents. The cultural presentation of Christmas is now slowly becoming a holiday without Christ. Thanksgiving was a time that was dedicated to thanking god and Christ for the many blessings we really do enjoy because of the grace of god. Unfortunately it seems that there is little evidence in the society we live that that still abounds.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Our forefathers fought for and believed in religious freedom. It seems we are living in a culture that has a direction it is going which wants freedom from any religion, especially Christianity. Jesus told us to keep awake but maybe it is time for us to wake up and affirm in our hearts and our lives the importance of Christmas being about Christ.

An employee is killed at walmart by the rush of the crowd who then get angry because they are told the store is closing because a man has died. Two people shot to death at a toys r us. We see video of people fighting over the last x box.

Our world needs Christ to be the center of Christmas and we need to be the leaders of the way. We ask for the grace to cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armor of light. Christmas is about Christ. Christ who is about the sanctity of life, love for one another, the call to servant hood. The idea that it is not what you have or can get but what you do with what you have.

God's idea that in a little baby, Gods world would see a new way of living and a new way of loving.

I told you I wrote a poem for thanksgiving many years ago that I used for a sermon on the eve of thanksgiving I would like to finish with it this morning.

Tis the night before thanksgiving and we all gather here

Some familiar, some strangers, all are welcome-have no fear

We have gathered to give thanks for all kinds of stuff

For homes and for jobs, even times that are rough.

We gather to give thanks because we know life is more

than houses or money and doing your chores.

Life is family. Life is friends

life is relationships of love without end

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*life is accepting those we don't understand
of those who are different, even those from another land*

*life is about caring for those who have less
those who have nothing, those under duress*

*life is about loving, about being a friend
about learning to live with new beginnings and not an end*

*Life is for sharing the good and the bad
the times we are happy the times we are sad*

*Life is so many things to one and another
But it's important to remember you are my sister and brother*

*We are asked to be thankful, not for all that we have got
But for what we do with it whether it's a little or a lot
Thanksgivings the time amidst the turkey and dressing
to stop and consider what are really our blessings*

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*this poems in place of a sermon that's odd
But I hope it speaks to you something of God*

*His gift of life given to us is for living
For loving, for sharing to be forgiving*

*The end of this poems is now coming in sight
I know you are glad and I know you are right
We have much to give thanks for at this time of thanksgiving
But let's not forget who gave us the gift of living.*

Amen.

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