"Bless the Lord, my Soul"
Thanksgiving 2013

“We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing”

I remember one particular Thanksgiving because of the blessing.

Rose was just 4 months old,
   I’d brought her home Vietnam
      only a few weeks earlier.
So all the family – her aunts, uncles, great aunts,
   great uncles, cousins and second cousins,
   gathered at her grandparents’ house
   to meet her
   and have Thanksgiving dinner together.
      Something we hadn't done for years.

One of her greatuncles, my mother’s brother
   made a comment about her beautiful Asian eyes,
      if I’d planned to get them fixed,
We took our places around an extended table,
   and bowed our heads as he,
      retired pastor, with a remarkable career
   or service and charity prayed.

Dear Lord, he began,
   We thank you that you have gathered us here,
      all of us related by blood.

the air went out of the room

my mind raced:
...“all our us related by blood?”
Aat least half of those at the table,
   as well as this darling baby,
      aren’t related by blood,
         they’d all married in.

And, anyway, Thanksgiving is all about
   sharing food with those
      who don’t share your bloodline.

What kind of God are we praying to?

I barely heard the rest of the prayer
   the list of thank yous
      the request to bless the food and us.

After the Amen.
   a cousin to my right immediately turned to me and said,
      quietly,
         "I will never forgive him."

And my mother, took a breath said in a voice we all could hear
      Well, Harold, it’s too bad you aren’t thankful
         for your own wife!

Beneath that prayer was an understanding

that our family was united by our bloodline,
   rather than love that.

   that God’s blessing comes through our sameness
      rather than our differences

We gather together.....
This past week, I witnessed a couple signing papers to dissolve their marriage and then yesterday attended the special session of the West Ohio conference of the United Methodist Church where we did the same.

20 pastors and 80 churches had completed all the requirements to leave the denomination, with their church buildings, and join a new denomination, where they will know the blessing of sameness of mind as to discipline and doctrine.

After all years of dialogue around tables of rancor in voting, it was a quiet ending,

There are, clearly, irreconcilable differences about our unity and sameness or in our differences.

The mood was sober, just as it was as the couple signed the papers, as it was around that family dinner table,

How shall we live with one another, when so much separates us? in our families, in our nation and even in the church of Jesus, the Christ.
Early in his writings,
    we find Paul quite dogmatic
    about who is in and out,
but then, he was confined in prison in Rome,
    probably between the years 60 and 62,
    and something changed,
    he was liberated inside,

He wrote to the church in Colossae,
    to hold them firmly together in their understanding
    that Jesus is the Christ, and other core truths,
    but to allow each other the freedom of
    differences of ways of living.

He advises them

12 As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved,
    clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness,
    humility, meekness, and patience.

13 Bear with one another and,
    if anyone has a complaint against another,
    forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you,
    so you also must forgive.

14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love,
    which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
    to which indeed you were called in the one body.
    And be thankful.

Colossians 3: 12-21
And perhaps that’s the recipe for how to survive thanksgiving, 
and life in a divided nation and church,
Bear with one another.
clothe yourselves in love,
    let peace of Christ rule your hearts,
    and then comes that last word,
    and the other great challenge
    and gift of this holiday:
    Be thankful, he says,

Now, I can find a nearly endless number of things 
to be thankful for,
    but I wonder all the time how other’s can.

Those folks living on our frozen streets, 
the war victims in Ukraine, and Poland, 
    facing bitter cold,
    all those fleeing violence and rising tides, 
and famine
and all those living in the winter that is grief,

It is quite a call, that Paul has,
    to above all, be thankful,

But it is clear, that if we embody all these things 
if we bear one another in our differences,
    forgive one another our humanness, 
    and find a way to be thankful in all things,
then perhaps we ourselves become the blessing.

Our psalm today, 103
    Bless the Lord, O my soul .
    All that is within me bless God’s holy name.
This is not a superficial prayer,  
not something to recite or endure before we eat,  
it is the prayer of our life.

This blessing isn't something we say,  
it is something we are, says Paul.

It is the prayer of our innermost being.  
that part of us that understands more we seem to.  
that part that will live on with God, forever.

The call is to our soul to bless the Lord.  
even when our outermost being  
is in too much pain  
or too hurt,  
or struggling with others,

to realize in our innermost being  
that the one who give us life  
is always leading us toward it,  
inviting us to be clothed in compassion, kindness  
humility, patience, and above all love,  
and so letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.  
which allows us be thankful in all things.  
we become the blessing to God  
and all creation,  
we say with our lives: **Bless the Lord, my soul**

When we worry about our future, or those we love,  
*but know God has brought us this far,*  
**Bless the Lord my soul**

When we are uncertain about the future of the church  
yet trust that God is in this with all of us,
Bless the Lord, my soul.

When we see the divisions in the country
and recognize that we may also be a part of that,
Bless the Lord, my soul.

When we aren’t sure how to love those
who are different from us, but long to,
Bless the Lord my soul

May we be a blessing to the Creator.
    may we live with courage
    may we create goodness.
    may we love the unloved
    May we be given enough light to
    find a way through dark times.

Bless the Lord, my soul, and may I be a blessing.
    to you,
    in Jesus’ name.

Amen.
Rockwell Freedom from Want
   Diverse Thanksgiving
   Presence
   Tears and Prayers
   Philippines Singing
      Woman in Landscape – may be too small.
   Light in Trees