

**"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?"*  
At 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 paper  
to dissolve their marriage  
irreconcilable differences  
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

*<sup>12</sup>As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,  
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness,  
humility, meekness, and patience.*

*<sup>13</sup>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.*

*<sup>14</sup>Above all, clothe yourselves with love,  
which binds everything together in perfect harmony.  
<sup>15</sup>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