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HOW TO GIVE THANKS AT THANKSGIVING

—a sermon by the Rev. H. Paul Santmire
Wellesley College Chapel
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My text is the New Testment lesson heard read this morning, the account of the feeding of the four thousand and the story of the Pharisees request for a sign(Mk. 8:1-13). I will also reach into some material in the remainder of the eighth chapter of Mark, for reasons which I hope will be readily apparent.

I intend this to be a "how to" sermon, to address a problem which, I take it, is before most of us this very moment as we think about the forthcoming Thanksgiving holiday, ~~qiu'l'-'ll —wtecaaag"ifcir quo own lives~~ This is the question! am posing this morning: how can we give thanks at Thanksgiving?

Thanksgiving, I do not need to remind you, is a problematic time for many of us. To begin with, all of us are very much aware, especially in congregations such as this one, that the problem of hunger weighs very heavily on the world today. /~~We kiy^^~~ ~~kr~~ that ~~on any giveil day~~; Such Jas this one,~~suii^^4~~f\ ~~teen thousand people~~ aypund Zne wopfdZ ma^fy of Zhetn children, ape dying/fov-dkac^s^2str^z-jLus food./ W^ know, Zs t/rWly~/tha t mi Pl ions ***more*** aroupra the ~~world suffer~~ ~~from~~ malorftritiopr anttzfrom fTTA ~~^ela^^^rahleAif;~~nf hfai ~~n damage~~ ~~r-npr ri-nil" i-hiiti'inn | nilin:r-nlrTTniwrî, nnd ili~rTrr s~~

Yet Thanksgiving is more or less a time of gluttony for most Americans. As I remember gxwingxup my family's Thanksgivings as a boy, I remember dish after dish of fine meats, dish after dish of vegetables, dish after dish of fresh breads. Such is the experience l~~Awft~~ many 8LHLXL Americans, perhaps many of us here this morning, iirmFTWWRlirmn~~ilTh~~anksgiving time.

So there's th<g tension, hunger, on the one hand, and gluttony -- or something that looks like gluttony much of the time, -- on the other hand. But that's not all that's problematic about Thanksgiving.

There is the phenomenon that I think can be called "the Thanksgiving neurosis," akin to the "Christmas neurosis" that some psychology textbooks dalk about. The Thanksgiving neurcLs: this means all those problematic feelings about your home, your parents, or the absence of home $i»£~parents.

As a student, you may be feeling ambivalent about going home at Thanksgiving because you may be wondering whether your family will receive you on your own terms, as a young adult, or whether you will somehow find your salf falling back into your more familiar place at the Thanksgiving table, as a child.

As an older adult, you may be feeling ambivalent about Thanksgiving -- perhaps without fully being aware of these Reelings — because you would like to have some parental figures aroudd to take care of you, to prepare a Thanksgiving table for you, instead of you having to be the one who takes the initiative dnd who does all the preparing.

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For these, and other reasons, I suspect, Thanksgiving can be a rather problematic time for many of ust thrr>te~n?Ttimof

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-Tit-ii :ir:' T Bg 11 >ijfc, it's no wonder/that? sometimes we find it difficult to • fhe-rgive-thanks-ourse-in-our ts-to at Thanksgiving. *+■j may-be-the-ease-we-"iri- -.-"aahrrn 2,1 >n'n[T irthranrH -> hwr Til ml i t-i"iT<s ... ..g is ove ..

But I think we can give-in-thanks-T.g. think there is a way to lift our hearts to God with a genuine sense of gratitude^ ^n=&5d* for the benefits we have received. HSg^=BP>T— qnnYttwnrvfrhTT.*harlfirr^tefa3> morning,-*■ -how-to-give-.thmilHT' A t TkrSnkegLvi.i»zL»

'TJCa*-'

With a view/jto the narrative in the eighth chapter of Mark, I want to make three suggestions: first, that we think about what is real; second, that we think about what is dangerous; third, that we think about what is cabled for.

I.

First, what's real.

From a literary point oT view the narrative in the eighth chapter of Mark leaves ofis&i to be desired. The story of the feeding of the five thousand in the sixth chapter is much more dramatically constructed, for example. The story of the feeding of the four thousand here has a kind of prosaic quality to it. Likewise the flow the the narrative in the eighth chapter is bumpy, at points even rather artificial sounding. £T ca jur.fr nor. 4^hua.m.<i^naT_comments a typioarl Wellesley instructmi-would r1 0 on th W chap Le- t were a student's paper: "you don't se°n to bn conft idef£ x 'n youir own argument." "the transitiiis you"male are rather awkward," and so on.)

But maybe these stylistic problems are providential. Maybe they can help us to see more clearly that Mark's underlying intention here is not literary, but theological. Fundamentally, he'w writing to testify to what is real in life, in the midst of all our distresses and our, tensions

When I was giwwing up summer times were not the kind of happy days that they can be today. When I was gvvwing up, as miiay some of you will also recall, summer was the time of the polio season. Summer was the time when you wanted to go swimming and your parents wouldn't let you, for fear that you BMMM might contract that casa^apdang dreaded disease.

Then Dr. Jonas Salk and others researchers came along, and as a result polio is more or less unknown among our childred today.

Imagine yourself now living in a world that is burdened by the kXEakx threatxpf of polio. Imagine yourself jsew having heard of Dr. Salk's discovery. Imagine yourself having of vision of the healing that could be brought to many as a result. Imagine yourself writing a story which tells about Xha£ the reality of your vision.

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ex This is the kind of thing that *fp,* Mark is doing in the chapter before us today. With a kind of majestic simplicity he narrates the real of this Life, what is truly LL8 decisive in human experience: thefmnistry of Jesus.

With Jesus, Mark believes, the Kingdom of God£ has begun to dawn in human experience. With Jesus, according to Mark, we humans can experience the love of God that meets our deepest needs, both physical and spiritual, /in the ~~account~~ story before us today the accent is definitely on our physical needs: Jesus is here the revelation of the God who is **cfbtMflBtclj juid** resolutely committed to feeding all the hungry people on this planet. / In the account of the feeding of the five thousand two chapters earlier, ~~you will recall,~~ Jesus was depicted ~~as~~ with a different nuance as the one who is the Good Shepherd, tzho is the revelation of the God who^selove **omlmwKLo** our deepest spiritual deeds, who^^^^0^ ~~LsNvhcs~~ us when we are **IniirTr ml** in ~~nlnl wiilliiw~~ ~~deepest need~~ feeling homeless or lonely or abandoned. This is also the healing ministry of Jesus.

Imagine that you happened to know Jonas Salk as a neighbor, ~~let us say.~~ Imagine that he had confided to you that he had made this dixKHVKKXHg discovery that would end polio. Imagine that you knew it, and that your immediate impulse was to broadcast this wonderful news to everyone wks in the world.

So Mark, with great joy, and reverberating through the understated WL'^onality of his narrative, is telling all who will listen what Peter later in the chapter confesses in so many words of Jesus: "You are the Christ." Here*^ Mark Is saying, although the world many not yet know St or udderstand, is the emergence of ultimateultimate ~~amazing~~ Peter, ultimate redemption in the midst of our own mundane experience: Jesus is the^Xnrilt of God. Thafe is what's real, ultimately real, in our human experience,-, ~~he's suggesting~~ according to Mark's testimony.

"In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called Lx his disciples to Him, and said to them 'I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now threedays, and have nothing toeat; and if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on^the way; and some of them have come a long way."

This is what's real, according to Mark.

———Afone Level or another, you and I have come a long way? At one level Y>r antoher, vou and T are fainting, in nde'd 5f-true sustenance, for our lives. Mark's testimony is that Jesus is ttie One, as the Christ of God, who can feed us, who can give us the strength we need, who can shepherd us in our times of stress aid give us occasion to celebrate in our times of moii t aIted joy. ~~This is what's real: the ministry of~~ Jesus in ourjii^st.

~~II.~~

Second, I want to call your attention not only to what is real, but to what is dangerous, ~~according~~ to Mark.

This theme enters in the eighth chapter in terms of Mark's reference to the pharisees seeking a sign. We also see the shme theme later in the chapter when Mark depicts Jesus as telling his disciples to beward of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven

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So this Thanksgiving, I suggest, ~~to vox and~~ ~~mek this~~ ~~■Wiwii.noj~~ we al^bLJl be well advised to think about-MSS-G» ~~mini.jnhant~~ the^m^^try of Jesus in our midst. If this zS & what^iSSflfy real life, if ~~this event~~ of Jesus coming to us is the event which gigt>s meaning to every other event, then W you and I can truly give thanks this Thanksgiving. **

Think about Jesus as the one who comes to feed the hungry and to call the lonely to communion with him. Think about Jesus as the revelation of the God who is ~~absolutely~~ deeply committed to the oppressed and who is resolutely committed to every anguished heart. /Think abdut Jesus as the..—s Chris t of Gy6d 6« 1-V>e nbje^r of your/ oraLLe thi s ThankKgiving, then (the t/nsions pf gjZttony and h^nger,^KL.t he cfirenand, and our Thanksgiving neuroses 7^orT"th«-rJther, ca^i be set in proper perspective . Then you and I, ±.-heliev^, will be able to give thanks, truly, notwithstanding th ose tensions.

II.

L Second, I want to call your attention not only to what is real, but to what is dangerous, according to Mark.

This theme emerges in the eighth chapter in terms of Mark's reference to the pharisees seeking a sign. We also see the same theme later in the chapter when Mark depicts ^esus as telling his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

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Let me make an immediately Thanksgiving connection. If your Thanksgiving bread is to be leavened by the leaven of the Pharisees or the leaven of Herod, then you'll never be able to give thanks, in any authentic way. "Beward of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod," ~~says Jesus.~~ That's what's dangerous.

I translate Mark's meaning here in the following way; bewarck of the influence of the religious establishment; beward of the influence of the political establishment.

If you've been reading*"Efee^papers lately, you may have noticed that the National Council of Churches has #fee^£y fired the man who has been at the helm of its Church and Society Division., ~~for wiftnywyritr^~~Tag, Lucius Walkee for many years was a prophetic voice for social justice, for black Americans, for native Americans, for third world peoples, and so on. Now, there are extenuating circumstances in the firing; there always are. But all in all it looks as if the august National Council of Churches is retreating from its commitments to the poor and the oppressed which got it into so much holy hot water in earlier years.

If you've been reading the papers lately, you may^have read stories abouFa return to religion in America ,)\that Church attendance is up in those communities which are more attundd to the spiritual needs of their people, rather than to questions of social justice. For this return to ~~religion~~ spirituality, if that is what it is, we can be thankful. But we also have to bewarL of the leaven of the Pharisees.

Recall the qffltaBBSB words of our Old Testament lesson this morning: "Behold, in the day ofP your fast you seek your own pleasure, and opppess all your workers.... Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of A—"-y t~~r- wlekdhre~~»shftB~~gr rrf m'.rl r ilur nn~~ to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yank yoke? Is it Snot to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house?"(Is. 58:3-7)

So, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. Beware of the leaven of the priest and the levite who passed by the wounded man on the other side of the read, on their way, no doubt, to fulfil some religious duty.

Likewise, beward of the leaven of Herod. I scarcely need to remind you about e p-rrqr'-~~th~~ i ~~in our day about the~~ poli.ti Fim" s in our day who standadamently for the fight to life of the unborn while crying our viciously for the death penalty. I scarcely need to remind you about the popular mind in our day which is lifting the question of property rights to the center of the national agenda, and letting the question ofjauman rights fall to the dust -y*** I scarcely need to remind you about^ aca'd^emic'^leaders wksx'and' students who say that they deiest appartheid but Who seem to be wholly committed to business-as-ysual,in practice. Beward of the leaven of Herod.

If Thanksgiving's all about ~~gxxkkxxnyxxnd~~ security and gluttony, all about having this wonderful affluent bash forgetting about the ~~hungers~~ sufferings of the world, then no wonder it's difficult for folks to give ~~thanks~~, truly.

IF Thanksgiving's all about affluence and gluttony, then no wonder it's difficult for those of us who know about the hungers of the world to give

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the ways of the Pharisees and the ways of Herod.

III.

How to give thanks at Thanksgiving?, First, think about what is real, about Jesus, about his ministry in our midst, as the revelation of the God who^lawMthe ujjpi and who calls the lonely by name. Second. th|nk about what is dangerous^ about the leaven of the Pharasees and Herod, about the influence of those who would do business-as-usual, notwithstanding^rhetoric to the contrary.

Then, thirdly and finally, I suggest that we think about what is galleci for this Thanksgiving.

Here I reach to the end of the eighth chapter of Mark, for these familiar words: "If any would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow me."

Thinl-[illegible] **r~Trrn**fF nf r**li m i pl" -^jp** [illegible] **this-Pk-init "pH"**[illegible]**C**

What does mean? It means that you and I ere called not to a life of security, but to a life of uncertainty. It means that you and I are called not to a life of self-aggrandizement, but to a life of self-giving.

There was a story in the papers last year about a mother and a father who happened to come home from a night out to find their baby sitter aileep and their house on fire. They ran in^aed $xpused her,and rescued her and their sleeping children. No reporter xxxkkankxgHti^xEKKHxfckHx , thankfully, asked them, in follow-up interviews, whether they were sad that they had lost all their belongings.

Of course they weren't. For the lives of those most dear So them, which had been destined for death, were graciously saved. Hox^could they regret the lose of their possessions/* **whejt-I'hry~1**[illegible] **uhildrgn?—**

"UwiiiuWB HfiKMftBwiyd if you and I, as disciples of Christ, — as a people who are committed to taking seriously what is really real in this life, who are committed to avoiding the dangerous security of the Pharisees and Herod, -- if you and I, in this way, lose our worldly security, and gain our humanity: so much the worse for worldly security.

As some of you know, one of the exercises to participate in,^3^s discuss**iuMft^gi** the realities of death and dying ^is to write their own obituaries. That is to say, we ask them to place themselves at the end of their lives, to look back, find to write about what was of value in their lives. It's a sobering exercise. fishnwingp-yggj Hat it can-be liberating, too.

What would you want to say about yourself in your obituary? What would you want someone else to write about youWLZF should you die? Would you want them to observe that you went to a prestigious college, that you had a successful career, making $**00** ,000 a year and living in a gotfeeus colonial in Grosse Point? Or would you want, them to say about you that you were a loving person, **cr g06ff~Jjfaiinudcfcngy 'Phaju~~ TOW dapanded~im—** longsuffering^in time/^'of^rial through your Christian commitments, capable of rejoicing in times of uncertainty and despair?