

Psalm 95:1-3 NRSV  
Thanksgiving, An American Tradition?  
WRCoB 11.22.20

If we were not in a pandemic  
    This coming Thanksgiving Thursday  
        Families would gather in gratitude  
            For the good things God has provided.

They would fill the table with indigenous food items  
    Turkey, corn, cranberries, squash and pumpkins.

It's an American tradition rooted in our history and heritage.

Or is it?

Ask any child in grade school  
    They'll tell you that back in 1621  
        The Native Americans and the Pilgrims  
            Got together for a big feast  
                To celebrate a good harvest.

But is it an All-American tradition?

How do the Native Americans feel about Thanksgiving?  
    Or how about the African American?

Everyone knows this Thursday is Thanksgiving.

But did you know Friday is Native American Heritage Day?

Let's talk about this for a little bit.

The first Thanksgiving was two years  
After the first enslaved Africans  
Landed at Point Comfort in Virginia in 1619.

I wonder if the early African enslaved people  
Felt like celebrating Thanksgiving?

In fact, many did embrace the holiday  
But for a totally different reason.

It was a day the field-working slaves had off.

The men folk went to the woods in search of wild game  
While the women prepared cornpone and greens.

The enslaved who worked in the owners' home  
Didn't have the day off though.

They had the hard task of preparing all the food  
Setting the tables, serving and cleaning up  
For the white family and their guests.

They did take the opportunity  
To bring home some of the "leftovers".

The enslaved Black Christians  
Though they abhorred their fate in life  
And despite their suffering and struggles  
Gave thanks to God.

If nothing else, they were grateful for the long anticipated  
Bliss-filled life that followed their hard life on earth.

William Covington, in the blog, *Our Weekly* writes

*“There is a very good chance that at the first African American Thanksgiving dinners, there were slaves with scarred backs of raised skin, a result of brutal discipline of the owner.*

*There is a very good chance that at those first Thanksgiving dinners there was a little slave girl who had been violated.*

*There is a very good chance that all individuals there had no control of their lives. But without question there is a very good chance that at those first African American Thanksgiving dinners the slaves held hands and prayed to God for better days.”*

In 1808, Congress abolished the international slave trade.

Absalom Jones, one of the first ordained Black ministers  
Commemorated the decision.

*“Fifthly, and lastly, let the first of January, the day of the abolition of the slave trade in our country, be set apart in every year, as a day of **publick thanksgiving** for that mercy. Let the history of the sufferings of our brethren, and of their deliverance, descend by this means to our children, to the remotest generations; and when they shall ask, in time to come, saying, What mean the lessons, the psalms, the prayers and the praises in the worship of this day? Let us answer them, by saying, the Lord, on the day of which this is the anniversary, abolished the trade which dragged your*

*fathers from their native country, and sold them as bondmen and sold them in the United States of America.”*

The slaves celebrated Thanksgiving, for sure  
But for very different reasons.

And then, January 1, 1863  
President Abraham Lincoln signed  
The Emancipation Proclamation decreeing  
Freedom for more than 3.5 million slaves.

Thanksgiving became the occasion  
To celebrate their liberation from the horrors of slavery  
And for hope for a better life.

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For the Native American  
Thanksgiving is a day of mourning and protest.

They too mourn the injustices incurred upon them  
Following the arrival of the Europeans  
And centuries of oppression and genocide.

For the past 48 years, a group calling themselves  
The United American Indians of New England  
Use November 22<sup>nd</sup> not as a day of thanksgiving  
But as a day of lament.

Here's how they describe it..

*“Thanksgiving day is a reminder of the genocide of millions of Native people, the theft of Native lands, and the relentless assault on Native culture. Participants in National Day of*

*Mourning honor Native ancestors and the struggles of Native peoples to survive today. It is a day of remembrance and spiritual connection as well as a protest of the racism and oppression which Native Americans continue to experience.”*

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Native Americans do celebrate a kind of Thanksgiving.

Giving thanks is central to their culture.

Native Americans have a deep appreciation  
For family, for community, and for nature  
And for God's benevolence in a good harvest.

The Native American Heritage Day  
Celebrated on the Friday after Thanksgiving.

Is a time for Native Americans to recognize  
Apart from the Euro-American's version of Thanksgiving

The beauty, and the strength and the resilience  
Of the Native Tribes in North America.

Again, from the website  
Of the United American Indians of New England.

*We remember the generosity  
Of the Wampanoag tribe to the helpless settlers.*

*We remember the hundreds of thousands  
Of Native Americans who lost their lives  
At the hands of colonialists  
And the genocide of whole tribes.*

*We remember the vibrant and powerful Native descendants  
Families, and communities that persist to this day  
Throughout the culture and the country.*

*We remember people  
Like Sharice Davids and Debra Haaland who in 2018  
Became the first Native American women  
Elected to Congress.*

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Our psalmist instructs his listeners  
To enter into God's presence with Thanksgiving.

To make a joyful noise with songs of praise.

For God is great.

In God's hand are the depths of the earth  
And the heights of the mountains.

God made the sea and formed the dry land.

O come, the psalmist says, let us worship and bow down  
Let us kneel before the Lord.

For he is God and we are his people.

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It is not an easy time to be grateful.

What with the pandemic  
Loss of our mobility  
Particularly this Thanksgiving.

Loss of jobs and income

At risk of exposure to a deadly disease.

It is a very uncertain time.

I suppose in light of the election

Approximately half the country can be grateful  
For the results of the election.

The other half . . . not so much.

But repeatedly, Scripture calls us to give thanks

In any and every circumstance.

**1 Thessalonians 5:18 CEV Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do.**

Pretty tough to do, isn't it?

**Philippians 4:6 NRSV Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**

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There are things we can be grateful for this Thanksgiving  
Whether you're descended from the pilgrims  
Or Native American or African American.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, *"Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have*

*contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude.”*

So how do we give thanks this Thanksgiving?

The Shenandoah District DE John Jantzi,  
In the district’s electronic newsletter this week  
Wrote a prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Let me share it with you.

*Lord, for the ways you continue to preserve, protect and heal, we give you thanks.*

*Lord, for those who have suffered greatly through loss of loved ones, jobs and financial security, Lord, hear our prayers.*

*For the perseverance, strength and flexibility of families with children in school, we give you thanks.*

*For the stress, anxiousness and uncertainty for families as they cope with uncertain school schedules, Lord, hear our prayers.*

*For the manifold ministries and acts of mercy of congregations in our districts, we give you thanks.*

*For the unmet needs of suffering, loneliness and anxiety in our neighborhoods, Lord, hear our prayers.*



*For the beauty of the change of seasons and the grandeur of your creation, we give you thanks.*

*For those caught in the destructive forces of hurricanes, earthquakes and other natural disasters, Lord, hear our prayers.*

*For the wonder of joyous, Christ-filled relationships in the community of faith, we give you thanks.*

*For the fractured relationships and the painful divides of our country, Lord, hear our prayers.*

*For the security of your eternal promises and the certitude of the coming “new heavens and new earth,” we give you thanks.*

*For the struggle of seeing only “a poor reflection as in a mirror,” Lord, hear our prayers.*

*Lord, we give you thanks.*

*Lord, hear our prayers*

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All of us can be thankful this Thanksgiving.

Let us be thankful for the loved ones in our lives  
Who support and sustain us  
Through the uncertainties of this life.

We are not alone.

For the communities that we are involved with  
Church, school, and social groups  
A place of belonging.

For technology, that helps us through isolating times  
And helps to connect us with communities  
Both large and small.

Let us be thankful for health and strength.  
And for the lack thereof  
And the opportunity to help each other.

For the abundance of good things from God's creation  
Not only stored in our pantries and cupboards  
But shared with those less fortunate

And above all, for God, the Creator of all things  
Who redeemed us through Jesus Christ  
And sustains us through the Holy Spirit

Be glory and majesty  
Dominion and power  
Both now and forever.

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And so, this Thanksgiving  
Let us be aware of and sensitive to  
All the various ethnicities and cultures  
Who come together in gratitude.

We might come to the table grateful for very different things  
But we give God the praise and thanksgiving..