



Gratitude and Hope

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Does anyone else experience holiday whiplash when the first Sunday of Advent falls on Thanksgiving weekend? We're enjoying being with family and friends, still ruminating on what we're grateful for, and creatively using up the leftovers when it is suddenly time to bring the Christmas decorations out of the attic and put away the turkeys and pumpkins. In many a church, I've reassured the sanctuary decorators that it's okay if the Advent wreath is the only element present that first Sunday. As much as they love doing up the sanctuary for the season, few want to give up time with family over the TG holiday weekend.

I'd like a little bit of space to shift gears from the secular giving of thanks to the sacred preparation for the coming of Christ, tho that's rarely to be. Life is always moving on faster and faster. Events blur together with little time to appreciate what we have experienced. Yet, in this case the blurring might not be a bad thing.

We begin this weekend with gratitude. Whether or not your gathering pauses before the big meal for everyone to say what they're grateful for, it is a great reminder to ponder your own reasons to be thankful. The easy ones come to mind quickly: family, friends, pets, the scrumptious food of the day. More reflection is needed for gratitude in the midst of challenges: the right to vote even if the election didn't turn out as you wished or if it did. Health care that you need but wish you didn't. The long drive that makes it possible to reunite with loved ones for the special day. The long drive that gives time to gratefully reflect and even switch gears.

Then comes the start of Advent with Hope as the traditional theme for the first Sunday. I've written about Hope a few times before. Here, I'd like you to think about how gratitude can help hope grow. Challenges, tragedies, or conflict can shut down our capacity to hope. When we can see no way forward and doubt that hope is even possible is the very time we need to reach for gratitude. Remembering the ways we've been blessed in the past opens our eyes to what God is doing in the present. It is a reassurance that God indeed has a future filled with hope in store for us.

When the latest news headline wrenches at your heart, say thank you for where you see God already aiding those in need. Before you close your eyes at the end of a really hard day, think of one positive experience – no matter how small and – give God thanks. Pepper your days with brief “thank you!” prayers for the cat who wants a cuddle, the person who holds open the door or lets you into traffic, the silly song that makes you smile, the bright cardinal visiting the bird feeder. Each whisper of thanksgiving is a connection with God and provides nourishment for hope to grow.

May your Thanksgiving and beginning of Advent soothe your heart and bless your soul.

Grace and Peace.

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