

# SERMON DELIVERED AT AUBURN UMC, AUBURN, MICHIGAN

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Year B

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Text: Matthew 6:25-33

Title: "Deprived Thanksgiving"

Thinking about Thanksgiving this week, I came across a piece of wisdom I thought you might appreciate. A California scientist has computed that the average human being eats 16 times his or her own weight in an average year, while a horse eats only eight times its weight. This all seems to prove that if you want to lose weight, you should eat like a horse.

It reminded me of the summers in which I spent a week as a camp dean on the shores of Lake Louise at Camp Kinawind in which some of the kids did seem to eat like a horse. The camp consists of tent cabins out in the woods. Foot trails up stiff hills led young campers and their adult counselors to lodges. The lodges consist of four walls. The upper halves are screened. The roof, however, is a large, square piece of canvas stretched across a hip roof. They call them tent cabins. Bunk beds line the screen walls. Eight to ten people in each cabin. The philosophy of the camp is to keep campers as close to nature as possible in order to experience the wonder of God's creation. No broken glass for city kids. No honking horns. No computers or cell phones, iPads or Nintendos. No TVs or radios. Just the buzz of mosquitoes, the hooting of owls at night, the gentle sound of a breeze blowing through the leaves, the experience of living in community with a small group of people for one week.

I remember one cold morning I was sitting in the newly constructed dining hall drinking my coffee and enjoying a bowl of steaming hot oatmeal when one of the cabin groups came up to get their breakfast supplies: cold cereal, milk, juice, a few pieces of fruit. They collect their meal supplies in the morning and hike back to their campsite where it is prepared. There was a young girl in the group, maybe 9 or 10 years old. She looked at one of the staff members having breakfast with me, saw the steaming bowl of oatmeal, and with a drooling voice said: "Ohhhhhh! A hot breakfast!!!"

When I was leading canoe camps for senior highs, we'd come off the river after a week of paddling on the Black River. One of our first stops when returning to civilization was a grocery store. The first thing the kids eagerly searched for was.... what do you think? Not the candy aisle. Not the pop cooler. The first thing they crowded around was the drinking fountain. They couldn't wait to drink something cold after a week of warm lemonade and Tang.

What happens when we are deprived of the luxuries we so think we need? Or when we are deprived in other ways as when something or someone is taken from us involuntarily, how do we navigate the experience? How do we keep from being bitter or discouraged or worrying about not having enough?

The Bible offers some wisdom on our human condition when it comes to being deprived. The

Psalms are filled with the voices of those who have struggled and yet held to hope beyond those periods of hardship. Psalm 42 is one of those who experienced some kind of hardship, some kind of deprivation, and yet looked to God beyond it:

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again **praise** him, my help and my God.

The apostle Paul, shared his thoughts with the Ephesians, telling them to...

<sup>15</sup> Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ...<sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:15-20)

In the midst of days Paul calls evil, his remedy is to give "...thanks to God ...at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And Jesus in his sermon on the mount in Matthew's Gospel proclaims loudly as he speaks to people about being anxious which so often is about the fear of not having enough—enough security, enough resources, enough...you fill in the blank. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"

"...do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:25-33)

Thinking about this as we enter this week of giving thanks, isn't gratitude the perfect antidote for anxiety? Looking over the total scope of your life, hasn't God been good to you? As the opening video clip expressed, aren't there gifts in every day that we are alive for which to say "Thanks be to you, O God"? When we are paying attention, isn't Paul's admonition to the Ephesians applicable to us, as well, when he reminds them to give thanks to God always and for everything? Do you think the future will be any different?

One day this last week, I was listening to the radio and heard the story of a French father whose wife's life was taken in Paris at the Bataclan Theatre. He posted a note on Facebook to the ISIS terrorists. I heard it read while driving. He posted:

"Friday night, you took an exceptional life - the love of my life, the mother of my son - but you will not have my hatred. I don't know who you are and I don't want to know, you are dead souls.

“If this [g]od, for whom you kill blindly, made us in his image, every bullet in the body of my wife would have been one more wound in his heart. So, no, I will not grant you the gift of my hatred. You're asking for it, but responding to hatred with anger is falling victim to the same ignorance that has made you what you are.

You want me to be scared, to view my countrymen with mistrust, to sacrifice my liberty for my security. You lost.

"I saw her this morning. Finally, after nights and days of waiting. She was just as beautiful as when she left on Friday night, just as beautiful as when I fell hopelessly in love over 12 years ago.

"Of course I am devastated by this pain, I give you this little victory, but the pain will be short-lived. I know that she will be with us every day and that we will find ourselves again in this paradise of free love to which you have no access.

"We are just two, my son and me, but we are stronger than all the armies in the world. I don't have any more time to devote to you, I have to join Melvil who is waking up from his nap.

"He is barely 17-months-old. He will eat his meals as usual, and then we are going to play as usual, and for his whole life this little boy will threaten you by being happy and free. Because no, you will not have his hatred either."

It struck my heart to hear this as I drove down US10. Talk about being deprived! Yet, in the midst of his pain at the loss of his beloved wife, this man found in the depths of his pain the kind of power that only love can give. As I listened, though he doesn't say so, I heard him giving thanks to God. Maybe he isn't giving thanks to God, but as I heard it, I found myself giving thanks to God that this man—who could be so bitter, so angry, so hate filled that his son would have suffered—found the words and the courage to choose a different response. And that response was to refuse to adopt the hatred of the aggressors. When I heard this I heard Jesus voice who preached in the same Sermon on the Mount in which he says not to worry:

<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

As you sit down at your Thanksgiving table this week, for what will you thank God? One of the reasons I so love being in the outdoors for extended periods of time is that it reminds campers of what we truly need in order to live and what we can in reality do without. Being deprived of all the luxuries like flush toilets, cool drinks, fast food and air conditioning is an experience of bare minimum living. That kind of deprivation not only reminds campers of what we don't need, but of what we do need. It is also a clear reminder of all the things we take for granted: a soft bed, strong shelter, a heated\air conditioned

home, a warm shower, ice, the love of my life by my side.

Being immersed in the midst of nature—watching ducks swim along the shoreline teaching the ducklings to catch their lunch, an eagle soaring, a squirrel jumping impossible distances from twig to twig, a chipmunk filling its cheeks so full they look as if they'll burst, water trickling down a small creek, trees bending in the wind, soft voices around a campfire, sharing stories and lives.

“Look at the birds of the air,” Jesus says, “they neither toil nor spin and yet God provides for them. Are you not of more value than they? How much more then will God provide for you.”

As you sit down at your Thanksgiving table this week, how will you express gratitude to God? Can you find a way to use experiences of being deprived of something or someone to lead you to choose to respond with praise and thanksgiving for the blessings you have received?

Maybe this Thursday gives us what we need, a reminder that we can always find something for which to thank God and when we do so, it changes our hearts. As another Psalm reminds us:

Praise the LORD! O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 106:1)