



LIVE EACH DAY WITH THANKS AND GIVING

In the 286 topics I have tackled for my weekly messages thus far, this topic has been among the most attractive and unwieldy. Knowing this column would run on Thanksgiving Day, I leaped to the obvious focus: gratitude. But that is one, colossal cornucopia! Where would I even begin to unpack this bountiful subject at the very heart of Christianity?

Writers often start from personal experience; but God has given me more reasons to be thankful than a book could hold. And that would not be the first book written about thankfulness, nor the most authoritative.

One recent book on the topic is aptly titled, *Thanks!*, written by Robert Emmons, professor at the University of California, Davis. Emmons took a scientific approach to examine the effects of gratitude on physical health, psychological well-being, and relationships. He documented 13 transformational benefits of being grateful.

And although the book's subtitle, *How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*, sounds self-serving, Emmons points his readers outside of themselves toward the object of their gratitude: "...when you're grateful, you have the sense that someone else is looking out for you...and is responsible for helping you get to where you are right now."

Christians know that "someone else" is our loving God. And so, it is his divinely inspired book, the Bible, that is the ultimately authoritative book on the subject of gratitude.

Emmons' scientific findings come as no surprise, because the God behind science created us to thrive physically, psychologically, and relationally through gratitude. Gratitude rightly orders our relationships with Him and with other people.

When we humbly acknowledge that "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17), it fuels our eagerness to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...and your neighbor as yourself" (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37, 39).

And although the Bible abounds with people giving thanks to God in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and expressing it in actions toward others, it also comes as no surprise that Jesus modeled this for us better than anyone else in Holy Scripture. Jesus continually gave thanks to God the Father and shared blessings with others, often using a particular form.

When twice Jesus' compassion led Him to miraculously feed thousands of people, He took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to them (Matthew 14:19; 15:36). He repeated this form at the Last Supper, where He took bread, and gave thanks – even in the face of his imminent crucifixion. Then He broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

And again, after He rose from the dead, Jesus reprised this sequence at a meal with some men He encountered on the road to Emmaus. Although they were his disciples, they only recognized Him as He "took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them" (Luke 24:30). Christians still do this, using the same form and elements, in Holy Communion or Eucharist, which means "thanksgiving."

For followers of Christ, remembrance of his death for our salvation is the ultimate reason to give thanks. We can do this, not just on Thanksgiving but every day of the year, in the way He showed us: by taking all that we have been given through his grace alone, giving thanks to God the giver, offering Him our own brokenness, and sharing his many blessings with others.

May this thankfulness infuse our daily life as well as our Thanksgiving gatherings. May it inspire generous giving of all kind this holiday season. For, as God's written word reminds us, "All things come from you, O Lord, and of your own have we given you" (1 Chronicles 29:14).

Have a blessed and happy Thanksgiving! I give thanks for you.

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux