

# ST BART'S



**A Sermon by:**

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## Thanksgiving

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, November 28, 2013  
Thanksgiving Day—Based on John 6: 25-35*

It is not that I love Thanksgiving more than I love Christmas; I don't. Christmas, as you might expect, is pretty significant in my line of work; and even if it weren't from the theological perspective, I am a huge proponent of sparkling things—the bigger, the brighter, the better. There is a big tacky gene somewhere inside me! But somehow—and with apologies to those gathered here who actually cook from one who can't cook toast in a toaster—Thanksgiving always seems simpler, less charged. There are the obvious things about it that truly are less complicated—like there are no gifts to buy (except if you are really lucky, a nice hostess gift) and there are no thorny theological issues or miracles with which one must deal. Almost everyone can agree on the notion of being grateful. And, then, for preachers, the expectation is that the sermon on Thanksgiving Day, should there be one at all, be on the light side of light and first and forevermore short.

But there is a serious edge to this matter of gratitude, it seems to me. Both the practice and the mindset of gratitude very significantly affect the quality of our lives and the quality of the world in which we live. Being thankful is not just being polite—though for the record, I am all for polite; politeness, though exceedingly inexpensive, is one of the most valuable commodities available to us. And yet—I know that I am sounding like an old person here who is about to mention trekking through the snow on foot to school—if we are forgetting to teach our children to be polite in little things like remembering to say "thank you" and not simply for the great gift they have just received but for the waiter putting their ginger ale on the table before them in a restaurant or for the cab driver who has just scurried them from one place to another, we are doing them a terrible disservice. A lack of basic politeness is a common loss, the thought of which could jet propel me onto an unpleasant screed about entitlement—the widespread problem of it—but I shan't. Being thankful, working at it, not in a false or condescending way, but in a way that truly recognizes the worth and goodness—even if that goodness is fairly well-hidden—in all we meet is not just good behavior or politeness; it is attempting to mold our hearts and souls into the likeness of Christ.

Paul, in his little letter to the Philippians (authentically Paul, we believe) says a mouthful. "Let your gentleness be known to everyone," he wrote at the beginning of this chapter, this from a man who was not always known for being gentle. Like most of us preachers, Paul may have engaged in just the tiniest bit of projection. Reference my formerly acknowledged proclivity for ranting about entitlement: I write about that a lot because I know a lot about it personally. But gentleness: now there is a concept for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Occasionally in an obituary or funeral eulogy, we may acknowledge that one was a gentle person. But in the real rock and roll world of getting ahead, gentleness rarely shows up as one of the characteristics we are seeking on a job description. Even at my aforementioned age, I want go-getters around me, even still want to be one myself, but I want kind ones, ones who know the value of stopping to say thank you and ones who are gentle enough to have their heart strings affected by people around them, even the ones who are not always cute or highly productive.

So how do we do that? How do we live lives that are like that—kind and generous, gentle and even polite? I don't know the magic answer. Probably about the best I have is the common but profound wisdom that we do best doing it one day at a time, learning from both our successes and our failures, thereby allowing ourselves to be thankful for both. But, my friends, here on this lovely Thanksgiving morning, there is more to it than that. I think that we do it by

gathering in this place, or in others like it, as often as we can to share a transformative meal, known to us as the Eucharist, which means—the word itself—*thanksgiving*. I am sure there are other ways to do it, but this is the one in my tradition that helps me the most. Jesus said that this is food that will last forever and that it will fill our hunger in a way that nothing else ever will. I don't know why that is true; there is much about the story that confounds me and some about which I think we are all wrong; but my witness to you is that this particular means of grace does *for me* last forever. It is a lifelong journey, and, honestly, sometimes the transformation is fairly short-lived. But transformation is transformation. And I will take it gratefully every single time, when I am being transformed by something called “thanksgiving.”

In the name of God: *Amen*.

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