

Paying Attention to God's Peace

**Ps 126 & Philippians 4:2-9
803, 807, 457, 775**

**Finally, beloved, whatever is true,
whatever is honourable, whatever is just,
whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence
or if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.
(Philippians 4:8)**

We have a family tradition at Thanksgiving.
After we have given thanks to God,
each person says what they are most thankful about in their lives.
With three sons, eight grandchildren, and two greatgrandchildren,
that tradition happens in various groupings each year,
but it happens.

I've thought back this week over what I've heard over the past few years,
and it picks up on a theme we touched on last week –
family and food.

The families have not always been perfect,
and the kids have not always eaten well.
Crises in relationships have ended up in divorce sometimes,
and in reconciliations other times.
Kids have wandered into trouble and returned.
Grandkids have refused to eat essential nutrients,
but have grown up strong and healthy.
Greatgrandkids are still young enough
to simply be a delight, no matter what they do.

We've done the tradition once already this Thanksgiving,
down at the cottage in the foothills of Mount Baker
with three of our middle son, Michael's, four teenagers.
It was all about 'family and food' yet again.
We'll do it again this afternoon at our oldest granddaughter's house in Langley.
I suspect that 'family and food' will be prominent yet again.

What has emerged in this Thanksgiving ritual
is an instinctive wisdom of the human race,
a wisdom sown by God in our creation in their image.
That idea of 'their image' may sound a bit strange,
but the Christian doctrine of the Trinity – three in one and one in three –
makes God, in God's very essence, a family.
And in that family, we are nourished to flourish in every dimension of our beings.
Human beings know this from birth.
They reach out for the breast of their mother,
family and food.

In our consumer society of endless choices,
we have devised a bewildering range of options for supplying these basic needs.
And we engage in crucial debates about which options are best designed
to ensure our collective flourishing.
Lots of those debates have taken on a particular focus
in the federal election campaign that is entering its final week.
How will our human and natural resources be developed and distributed
to nourish us to flourish over the next several years?
I won't suggest how you should vote,
but I will encourage each and every one of you who is eligible
to exercise your privilege to shape the future of this country.
But again, it does seem to boil down to differing views
of the kind of national family we want to be and how to best feed that vision.

They didn't have elections in the Roman empire.
It was not that kind of society.
It ran on the imposition of the will of the emperor.
His image was on everything – money, walls, and military banners.
His soldiers were everywhere – in every town, every square, every road.
His power was absolute – lack of loyalty to this 'god' resulted in death, often on a cross.
Your family was the empire
and your nourishment came from their protection and benevolence.
All you had to do was obey the emperor without question.

Within this world of imperial power and tight control
emerged a small community who saw things differently.

They had been confronted and changed by a different kind of power.
They had found a different kind of family.
They were being nourished by a different kind of food.

This different kind of power was God's love,
seen most clearly in a prophetic preacher
whose protests had put him on a cross,
a cross that he had turned into a new kind of throne.

This different kind of family was the church,
a gathering, a community,
that encompassed different ages, nationalities, races, genders, lifestyles,
and drew them increasingly into the witness and work
of blessing the whole creation with God's mercy and grace.

This different kind of food was work of the Holy Spirit
in opening the eyes of this new family formed by God's love
to the riches of God's grace within them and around them.
The Spirit nourishes every dimension of our beings –
spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical –
with the banquet of God's bounty
that we have been singing so lustily about this morning.

This is God's peace, God's *shalom*, God's wellbeing
that the Trinity makes available to all of us for the taking.
It is God's food that fills us, surrounds us, gives us our very being
every second of every moment of every day.
To be fully fed by this food in this family, we need to pay attention to it.
We need to accept it, participate in it, and invite others to come home to it.

Pay attention afresh this morning
to what Paul is urging the Philippians to pay attention to.
It is the true and only reliable source of their thanksgiving and joy.
Whatever they find in the gifts God has given their family of faith,
whatever in that is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable,
that will produce excellence and be worthy of praise.
That is what they, and we, should think on, ponder continually,
pay attention to as they go about their work of blessing the creation.
That is what will feed them, and us, to grow within this family
for the sake of God's peace throughout the entire world.

Paul assures them, and us, that it is not the imperial power of Rome or any other nation,
exercised through fear and force,
that will bring about God's promised peace and prosperity.
Instead, it is the loving power of Christ Jesus,
seen most clearly in the overcoming of fear and death
on the Cross and in the Resurrection.
That power is exercised in community through dialogue and discernment,
through compassion and companionship.
The family and the food that flows from that loving event
is truly worthy of thanks and praise
in a world that is desperate for authentic flourishing.

Let us go forth this morning filled with gratitude for God's unique family and food.