

St. David's Episcopal Church, Thanksgiving, 11/25/2020 (Elizabeth Felicetti)

Thanksgiving has long been a favorite service of the church year, with the beautiful music and the focus on gratitude. This year, though, we don't get to sing the words to those beautiful hymns, and that compromises their beauty for many of us. It's also hard to preach about gratitude after such a miserable year, and we are still in the middle of the difficulty. Most celebrations are scaled down. Many people are not getting together with family, and no one is happy about it.

As your spiritual leader, my job is to tell you to offer gratitude, and I want you to know that I personally know how difficult that is this year. I am grateful for many things. This year, I got to celebrate an early Thanksgiving with my sister, and after not seeing any of my family in the past year, I was incredibly grateful for that. On the other hand, I am all too aware that I had not seen any of my family in a year, of course; that last Thanksgiving, I got to celebrate in Arizona with piles of siblings and nieces and nephews. I have no idea when I will get to see them again.

I am grateful that last week I got to complete my sabbatical and MFA final residency so that I was able to graduate, but of course the experience was not as good as being in person. I'm grateful for our live stream, but it's not as good as worshipping in person. I'm grateful for four months of being on disability because I came to understand in a way I never would have leading the live stream Sunday after Sunday what a poor substitute it is for presence. Being incarnate to each other. Yet also see what a gift it is especially when we started to celebrate the Eucharist again.

Did you all know that Eucharist means "thanksgiving"? We celebrate Thanksgiving every time we share Christ's body and blood. For four months here at St. David's, we did not celebrate the Eucharist. This year, I'm grateful that experience helped me to see that the Eucharist—Thanksgiving—plays an even stronger role in my personal spirituality than I realized. Not receiving the Eucharist devastated me, and now that I do get to not only receive but also preside, I have hope in a way that I did not during those four months without it.

Many of us are not together this Thanksgiving. In the prayer we will pray together at the end of our service, we will thank God for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on God alone. That part of the General Thanksgiving has long spoken to me at a deep level, but this year, I think it will be even more meaningful, while also harder. 2020 has been too full of disappointments and failures. I know that we will look back on this year as one of great trial.

How else will we look back?

In the General Thanksgiving, we also thank God for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty for this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love.

How are we finding splendor and beauty this year?

How are we wondering at life, not wondering how in the world this pandemic could have happened and which political party is most at fault, but wondering at God's good creation?

And the mystery of love: through my horrible cancer experiences the past year, I have been awestruck by the mystery of love. By expressions of love to me from people I would never have expected.

One thing I love about this difficult experience of trying to worship together safely are the inclusive bulletins because we aren't permitted to share our prayer books. Those of you watching from home have the bulletin in the eNews, and those here have physical copies you can take home. These all make the General Thanksgiving easier than ever to access. I hope you will ruminate over this prayer for the rest of our church year, which of course ends Sunday with the beginning of Advent and a new church year. Until then, prayer this General Thanksgiving slowly. Linger with these words and concepts.

Savor our Thanksgiving meal together at this table in a few moments. Some roll their eyes at our factory sealed little snack packs, but some are stirred that we receive wine, something that some other churches are not doing. And, of course, many churches are not sharing communion at all.

This Thanksgiving think less about turkey and more about the body and blood of Jesus. Eucharist, the true meaning of Thanksgiving.