

Thanksgiving Day
Year A, November 23, 2023

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Because Bob Cullen is so faithful in honoring Thanksgiving in a number of ways, I'm going to take this opportunity to say, "Bob—once again this year I'm giving you your wish for a 3-5 minute homily."

Last night I participated in the community Thanksgiving service celebrated by the Clarke County Ministerial Association, of which I am a member. This year the service was held at St. Luke's Baptist Church in Berryville, which is an African American congregation. The service was glorious, with spirited music led by their organist and choir, which was augmented with clapping and shouts of "Aaaay-MEN."

Each of the pastors in the ministerium had a small part, and Pastor Tyler Phillips preached a wonderful sermon—and longer than the ones you usually hear. But the most striking thing was that the congregation last night was the most racially mixed group that I think I've ever seen in Clarke County, with fully half of the congregants being white, and half being black. And we were all children of God. We were all followers of Jesus, taking the opportunity to worship together, to be grateful together, to give thanks together. Last night we were truly the Beloved Community that presiding bishop Michael Curry preaches about. It would be wonderful to see more of this.

In the coming months we will have more opportunities to sing with, worship with, work with, and generally hang out with members of the Black community. To get to know one another in new ways, and to work towards common goals.

And as we gather to worship on Thanksgiving Day, we come before God in a grateful posture, knowing that everything we have, really everything we are, is a gift from God. It's all grace, it's all undeserved bounty: our talents, our abilities, our souls and bodies are the results of God's radical, extravagant, abundant love. And so we come humbly before our loving creator with thanks.

That's not to say that we pretend everything's okay, or believe we won't have challenges or grief. Jesus shows us that we will have both of those things, and he lived them himself. No one can deny that there is racism and poverty in our community. But even as we work to eliminate those things, we are still to give thanks in all things. This posture of gratitude may seem paradoxical, but Jesus creates the greatest paradox through his own death; his suffering, crucifixion, and death will eventually bring life, hope, and freedom to all humanity. And this life, hope, and freedom could come in no other way. So Jesus shows us the deepest lesson of gratitude. As Brian McLaren says, "We are to be grateful not just in the good times, but also in the bad times; to be

grateful not just in plenty, but also in need; to maintain gratitude not just in laughter, but also through tears and sorrow.”

And if we are looking at our own lives, and seeing an abundance of love and grace, there is that much more worthy of thanksgiving. Amen.

The Rev. Melanie Lewis
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