

Community Church of Issaquah

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## Giving Thanks at Thanksgiving

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Does it ever make you curious when the day after Halloween we begin to think of Christmas and pay little attention to Thanksgiving? Even before we have put away the pumpkins and candy, some neighbors already have their Christmas lights on their homes. Some woman named Donna has already opened her Christmas tree lot. And lo and behold, many radio stations are playing only Christmas music. I feel so sorry for Mr. Thanksgiving. There aren't any songs that only focus on him, and the only focus for the few days before the celebration is purchasing a turkey large enough for a family feast.

I strive to work with some honor for the Turkey Day so that it does have a special meaning for me, and I imagine some of you do the same. Unlike my turkey loving friends, I am a ham lover and proudly bypass the poultry section of the store and head straight to the bovine sections of the meat market so I can buy my one slice of smoked ham. Then I take it home and prepare it for Thanksgiving dinner, I make sure that I have sweet potatoes (we call it yams), green beans and biscuits. Dessert is, of course, pumpkin pie. All of it washed down with sweet tea. That's my celebration of the special day.

But that is the culinary part of the day. For me, there is a more important element of the holiday that has a very significant impact on my life. That is the time I set aside to focus on identifying the people and things I am grateful for. Perhaps that's why I like the name Thanksgiving. Hopefully when you are having your own celebration, you will set aside some time for your own thanksgiving.

When I focus on that experience, there is also another part of my day that means much to me. I've given it a strange name and I would like to share that with you today. I call it the Three R's of Gratitude. Each of these R's have much meaning for me, and I hope you will give some thought to this new injection into your own day however you celebrate the holiday. Each of us will likely offer thanks for much that is in our lives, giving thanks is very appropriate and meaningful. But there is much more to this gratitude thing, and I'd like to share my thoughts with you.

The first R is Receiving. Our gratitude is based on the reality that we receive blessings, people, life gifts and more. It is important for me that as I give my thanks, I must give deeper thought to exactly what I have received. If I simply say, "Thank you, God, for all my blessings," all I have done is create a bundle of blessings without giving deeper thought to exactly what I have received. Oh yes, I know that there isn't time to be too detailed when we sit down at the table with everyone anxious to dive into the feast. So I'm not saying this is a quick unloading that happens at the table. My hope is that you will find a quiet hour or so

to sit in utter silence and give serious thought to detailing what you have received not just from God, but from those who are present in your life and the positive things that have taken place in your life. I have even given time to remember how blessed I have been to receive the love from those who have moved on to their life with Christ in glory. I'll bet you have some loved one who continue to let you receive the blessing of having had them in your life.

The second R is Responding. It is easy for us to create a bucket of blessings, say "Thanks, God," and move along. It's harder to acknowledge what you have received in life individually. Yes, I'm grateful for my family, and I work to respond to that blessing by thanking God for each one. The same is true for me as I sit remembering each of you and offer my thanks for you by name, one at a time. I want to spend time responding to the have received an outpouring of God's love from so many. Yes indeed, even if I sit in silence responding to everyone that comes to my mind and heart, I likely won't remember everyone or every blessing that I have received. Sadly, my brain is too small to recall everyone and everything.

That's not the point. The focus is simply to respond in some way to offer thanks for what your life has been blessed with. Do we do this responding only on Thanksgiving? Of course not. We respond to an outpouring of kindness, compassion, generosity, and more hopefully when it happens. Sometimes it's a simple thing, like my having received a very sweet card from a dear

friend that said, “You put the awe in awesome, the wonder in wonderful, the extra in extraordinary.” I immediately jumped on the phone to respond with my gratitude. That’s a simple way of responding.

There are times when responding is a bit different. When I set and respond to God’s having given me the most wonderful mother, whose words of love are still a part of my life, it requires more than just saying, “Thanks, Mom.” I spend time reflecting on her as a person, on God’s blessing given to me, and responding in thanks to her in spirit as she sits on the front pew in heaven. But the call is to respond to whatever you have received.

The third R is Remembering. Being on the receiving end of blessings and gifts is something that we should put in our memory bank. As we talked about getting a new Advent Wreath for church at the Board meeting, my mind moved to remember my own blessing from the first experience I ever had with an Advent Wreath. I had just months into my new calling at a church in Kansas, I had never been in a church that even observed Advent before, because it was not a Southern Baptist thing. But this church wanted Advent and they wanted a wreath. So I went to a local florist, placed an order for a beautiful Advent wreath and could not wait to show the church my find. Unfortunately, neither the florist nor I knew the correct colors of the candles, and my wreath was all red. I quickly went back to the flower shop and the florist and I got a good laugh. That

was 1978, and Susan the florist is still a dear friend who I remember and am grateful for every Advent Season.

You will have your own remembrances when you have your own time of reflecting on who and what you have received. The important thing is that you have the opportunity to acknowledge what you have received, how you have responding to that, and what your world of thankfulness is. If we spent time in the Scriptures looking at the stories of women and me who followed the Three R's, it would provide for each of us a path of understanding.

Read the first chapter of Luke and you will find the story of Mary being visited by the angel foretelling about the birth of her child who would be the Promised Messiah. Mary not only acknowledged that she had received a gift and responsibility of God's calling. She followed the 3 R's. She received God's gift of motherhood, she responded by offering her beautiful prayer which is called Mary's Song, and she remembered this gift of grace for the lifetime of Jesus until she stood at the foot of the cross as he died, and she never forgot her blessing of a son.

This holiday, my hope is that each of us will be inspired to give time and focus on the elements of thanksgiving. And I hope you will know that when I sit for a time of quietness, among the many blessings I will be remembering is you. I will offer up my deepest gratitude for you, and I am sure I will be remembering the times I have been able to share with you. I will spend time with my Three R's.