

RESTORING THANKSGIVING

...man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Deuteronomy 8

On Wednesday night driving home in the car, I listened to one of the saddest stories imaginable¹. It was the story told by a mother with cracking, pleading and desperate voice of regret for a child for whom thanksgiving reserves had hit bottom. Not only was her son of 17 unthankful for the things of this life: food, clothing, shelter, friends and family, he had no thanks to give for what should be the greatest cause of thanks for anyone "life itself". "Life I suppose", as the suicide notes read, "has become too onerous and monotonous to bear". With no longer a joy, or bearing hope or purpose or even a thread left of duty he had climbed up the Golden Gate Bridge in the hopes of finding an end that we know as Christians will never come.

The statisticians tell us that in our world, for every 40 seconds someone leaps from that spiral, or injects that syringe or springs in front of a subway train. The TCC subway drivers must deal with eighteen a year of those who do. Yet as alarming as such statistics are, how many more are left simply dead in spirit finding life is onerous, monotonous, and even overwhelming? How many consider their lives as the ancient Israelites considered their lives in the wilderness, as pointless wandering. What are you doing Moses? Have you lead us out in the wilderness to die? The spires of the Golden Gate call. Satan's voice speaks as he spoke tauntingly to our Lord "Cast Yourself down".

Perhaps we all find ourselves a little less than thankful for the lives we are given. Perhaps we all find ourselves somewhere on the continuum between despair and willing death. How then might I "restore thanksgiving"? The world (no surprise) gives no certain answers. The painful story I listened to ends with survivors in continued struggle.

The world is baffled and indeed calls it a mystery as to how people can reach such a state of despair in the midst of such beauty, opportunity and possibility. How could he throw it all away he was so young? How could he give up so easily, he lives in the land of opportunity? For those complaining in the wilderness of Moses we might say, "How could they reach, even remotely, the point of despair, for they had seen the power of God against Pharoah? Yet down that dark road of despair is where they went. Burdened, struggling poor miserable souls. For three quarters of suicides it's simply too burdensome to write a note. For the quarter that do they often write of the burden as in the typical phrase "I can't bear it anymore though I don't know what *it* is".

God Himself reveals the answer to anyone who asks. "*It*" is life without purpose. "*It*" is life without the power of God. "*It*" is existence of feeding the body but never the soul. The "*it*" is the burden of sin that makes work difficult. It is the curse that God spoke about to Adam and Eve. If you're finding thanksgiving levels low. If you desire to find "Restoration of Thanksgiving"

there is a truth to hear today. "Man does not live on Bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord".

For the "it" which cannot be borne is the fallen human condition that weighs heavily upon us all. It is, as the Psalmist cried aloud:

For my iniquities have gone over my head
Like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. (Psalm 38:4)

But bearing up the "it" which is too burdensome for human beings is the "Word". "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God".

The "Word" is not some abstract esoteric wisdom. Those going down the dark road of despair don't need mere words or even teaching. They cannot grasp that. Thanks be to God for we have something of substance more than that. The "Word became flesh and dwelt among us". He could be seen, heard and touched. His presence is real witnessed by real people. He comes and speaks to a burdened world saying, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.(Matthew 11:28-30)"

It was this Word, albeit, in the pre-incarnate state which would hold up the burdened people in the wilderness. At least this is what God's Word says.

1 Corinthians 10:4...for they drank of that spiritual Rock
That followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

They behold his presence in the Tabernacle. He led them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He rained down manna from heaven. And the people said "What is it?" It is a sign of God's presence. Now as God rained down his presence in manna he more powerfully rains down his presence in this Sacrament of his true body and blood which we receive today. And like Israelites of old we ask "What is this bread"? To which our Lord responds "This is My Body". Take and eat it, not so much for your physical sustenance and to ward off physical starvation but take it for spiritual strength of your soul. For in it is the forgiveness of all your sins.

The Word Incarnate. The Pre-Incarnate Word from Eternity is what sustains a man when he "cannot bear it any longer".

For Jesus Christ takes the burden of the "it" to the cross and pays the penalty. In the cross Jesus defeats death because he defeats sin. He restores us to what we were all meant to be "made in the Image of God". And in that Image we find Life, and Purpose and Status as Children of God.

Now incredible things happen when we live by the Word and in the Word. We become different sort of people even in adversity. St. Paul experienced the transformation. As he lived “not on bread alone but on every Word that came from the mouth of God” he had great strength so that no matter what his outward circumstances his heart was sustained with purpose in living, knowledge of His Lord and bestowal of the only title that will ever really matter “child of God”.

Here what the man says of his circumstances from our epistle reading:

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:11)

Paul learned what Jesus says “The Word cannot be broken (John 10:35)”. God and his promises are a sure and certain hope.

Our Old Testament passage from Deuteronomy was written on the wilderness side of Canaan. God paints the picture of their future. It is a glorious future!

7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, 8a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, 9 a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. 10 And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

The Israelites entered in and it was so. They were a blessed people. The nations in their midst envied them. They wanted to obliterate them and take it all from them. But the hand of the Lord was upon them. And the nation survived.

The nation survived until it gave birth to a new nation – a new Israel if you will. By baptism we are citizens of that nation. This nation was to receive promises also. But as the manna in the old Israel was focused on physical temporary sustenance and the manna of the new as food for an eternal journey, the land of Canaan for old | Israel was also just a pale shadow of good things to come compared to the Heavenly Canaan promised to the New.

But on such a track record of fulfillment we stand trusting the promises of God.

Come to the Lord’s Table today. As your faith is strengthened through Christ’s body and blood it may become you’re Thanksgiving Table. Be filled with hearts of Thanksgiving. May you know that man does not live on bread alone but on every word from the mouth of God. It is here that Jesus restores Thanksgiving. We have been given food for the journey wherever God leads

us. We dare not try to circumvent it. He gives us a foreshadowing of the feast to come so we may be encouraged to persevere.

With thanksgiving restored may we persevere and likewise be able to encourage others to follow.

Amen
