

CORN KERNELS, DRUMSTICKS AND GOD'S KINDNESS

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Psalm 100

Note: As worshipers entered the sanctuary, each was given a small plastic bag containing five corn kernels.

This coming Thursday we will join with family and friends in celebrating what promises to be the most richly abundant Thanksgiving day in our nation's history. For twenty-four hours we will count our blessing instead of our burdens. The Battle of the Bulge will be forgotten as we call a momentary cease fire in the war on our waistlines.

As we pamper our pallets with such gastronomic delights as
a plump and juicy Swift's Premium Butterball turkey,
roasted to a golden hue and fairly bursting with
succulent chestnut dressing surrounded by
heaps of fluffy, white potatoes and garden green peas
swimming in rich, brown giblet gravy—all the fixings garnished with a thick slice of rose-red cranberry sauce and to top it off,
a huge hunk of pumpkin pie and whipped cream.

With all of that on the table before us, it will be difficult to remember that 333 years ago, our Pilgrim Fathers sat down on their third Thanksgiving day to a meal consisting of five lonely kernels of corn.

The year 1621 had been a year of plenty. It had been easy for them to give thanks to God. The following year, they had a rather meager harvest, but once again they celebrated the season of Thanksgiving. However, in June of 1623, a seven week drought nearly wiped out their crops and after the fall planting had taken place, there was just one pint of corn left. This was distributed amongst the few remaining Pilgrims, giving them five kernels each.

Even so, they were determined to celebrate Thanksgiving. For, while life had been stripped of all its luxuries and most of the things we would call necessities, and they had only the barest essentials for survival, they still felt they were rich beyond measure in the things which matter most.

Our situation in 1956 is quite different. Our problem is not poverty, but the sheer abundance of material things. Compared with the Pilgrim Fathers and the majority of people in this, or any other time, we are rich beyond their wildest dreams. There are no adjectives equal to the task of describing our prosperity. Superlatives seems commonplace when we begin to take inventory of our material blessings.

We have a great deal in common with the little five year old girl who was saying her prayers.

“Dear Lord,” she said, “I thank Thee I have everything I want and
50 cents besides!”

Certainly that's a description of Morgan Park in the year 1956. We have everything we need and more beside. This will indeed be the most abundant Thanksgiving in the history of America, for when we sit down at our tables on Thursday, there will be drumsticks instead of corn kernels and we will find it easy to express our gratitude for God's great kindness.

Indeed, we face a totally different problem than was faced by our Pilgrim Fathers. Instead of bearing the burden of a grinding poverty, we have become so satiated with an abundance of material things we are in danger of losing an appreciation for the simple things.

I wonder what would happen if, on Thursday, we only had the 5 kernels of corn on our table each of us received as we entered the sanctuary this morning. Suppose, like Job, we were suddenly stripped of all our benefits. Suppose everything of worth was taken from us. Would we still have something left for which to be thankful this Thanksgiving day?

Someone asked Captain Eddie Rickenbacher what he learned from his more than forty days on a

raft at sea. He answered,

“I learned that if you have enough bread to eat and water to drink,
you have everything in the world for which to be thankful.”

Life for him had been cut down to its irreducible minimums. Bread and water. And yet, like the Pilgrim Fathers with their five kernels of corn, Eddie Rickenbacher found reason to give thanks.

What are the irreducible minimums for us? If all of our material blessings were taken away and we were left with bread and water...if we had five kernels of corn instead of drumsticks...what values would remain? What evidences of God's kindness would there still be for which we could be truly grateful? First of all, there would be --

The Sense of Sight.

Russell Criddle in Love Is Not Blind wrote an amazing story of what it means to be blind and then to see again. He had one of those miraculous operations of modern surgery and this is how he described what it meant to see.

“Everything looked beautiful. Nothing looked ugly. The wad of paper in the gutter, the words alone convey an idea of filth but I saw white, black and straight lines: color and symmetry unbelievably different from any other wad of paper in any other gutter.

“But after all, there was the beauty of people. Some children were playing in the driveway. An old lady walked toward us, and passed. I felt no great thrill that I was no longer blind; only the awful sense of beauty thrilled me to the limit of endurance.

“I hurried into the house, went to my room, and buried my head in the pillow. Not because I could see, but because I had not the capacity to digest so much grandeur. I wept.”

Yes, it must be a wonderful experience for blinded eyes to see again. But, in addition to what we

can see with these two eyes, when I mention the sense of sight, I am thinking also of that inner eye which enables us to see God,

to dream dreams,

to envision the needs of others,

to think and to plan for a better future.

This is one of the gifts of God's kindness which neither famine nor pestilence nor sword can take from us.

Of all God's creations, only man possesses this precious gift of insight and understanding.

The beast which roam the hillsides...

the birds which split the air...

the fish which swim in the sea...

the flowers that bedeck the earth...

while each are wonderful in their own right and realm, they do not have the gift of inner sight.

For instance, if I tell a joke and you hear and a horse hears, the horse won't give a horse laugh while you might. The horse just doesn't possess the capacity to understand the meaning of auditory sound.

You enter a beautiful cathedral and the arching beams, the stained glass windows, the golden voice of the organ all create a sensory experience which is translated into worship and you catch a momentary vision of the glory of the Eternal God.

But a mongrel pup, or even a thoroughbred "hound dog" with a pedigree as long as your arm, could stray into that same cathedral and know nothing of His presence. Animals do not have the capacity to see with the eye of the soul.

So, give thanks this morning for your inner sense of sight. That ability to understand. That capacity to see, not only with these two good eyes, but with that inner light. For this is a

possession which makes you rich indeed. Another of those values which remains is --

The Sense of Hearing.

All of us gathered here this morning have heard God speak, not in an audible voice as He did with Moses and the prophets of old, but through that still, small voice which is tuned to the frequency of our inner ear.

God always speaks in a way we can understand. A way which will meet our individual need. One of France's great Christian statesmen was once asked a question by an English skeptic.

“What makes you think God hears you when you pray in French?”

The Christian answered,

“Well, I guess it's because He always answers me in French.”

That's been our experience, too, hasn't it? For through our God-given sense of hearing, we have listened to His voice as it has spoken to us—in a language all our own—about a need which was distinctly personal and, therefore, in a way in which we could understand.

God speaks to us in many ways.

I have heard God speak to me in music.

I have heard His voice as I have fingered through the pages of this Blessed Book.

I have caught a faint echo of the Eternal in the birth-cry of my daughter, and that of my little boy when they were only minutes old.

I have heard God speak to me as I knelt beside my bed to pray.

I have heard Him speak to me in those midnight moments of the soul when life was dark and hard.

Though my finite wisdom would have chosen another way, I now thank God that through His infinite wisdom He knew there were gems of spiritual truth which I could only find in the treasury of darkness.

“Only night can yield the silent wonder of a star,

The breathless sweep of meteors in flight:

The ruby's fire and the diamond's clear white flame
Once burned in darkness:
And the great moth's wings with color that never knew a name
Emerged from darkness. Glorious lifted things.

"Oh dear heart, whatever be the depth of thy despair
Wait patiently, for God has set aside His treasures
For your strength and comfort there.
A star of hope. Faith's wings. His love's pure gold.
And there revealed His hand for you to hold."

The sense of hearing. The ability of the human soul to be tuned to the voice of the Eternal! What a rare and priceless gift it is, and for this you can give thanks this morning. And what is to be said for --

The Sense of Feeling?

Can it survive the catastrophes of life? Oh yes, this, too, is one of the values which remain.

One of the many dividends which accrued to my account during the seven years I traveled about this country was the friendship of a multitude of people. This is something I would never trade. One of the finest folks I ever met was a young paraplegic who, during World War II, lost the use of both limbs and was confined to life in a wheelchair. Yet, while his sense of physical feeling had been impaired, I have never met a more sensitive individual in all my life.

He still possessed a capacity for gratitude.

He still could give thanks and receive love.

He still was capable of feeling compassion for the needs of other people.

One of the most moving experiences of my life was to kneel beside his wheelchair and hear him pray for those less fortunate than he.

All the wounds of war, all the scars which battle had inflicted upon that boy could not kill his sense of heart knowledge, his awareness of inner feelings. This is one of the values which remained.

Should the day ever come in the life of America when everything of worth is taken from us and we are stripped of those material blessings which we hold dear, we will still possess a capacity for faith and hope and love.

Should we ever be forced to make a meal of bread and water, or sit down to a Thanksgiving dinner of five, lonely kernels of corn, we still will be able to find beauty among the ashes. And we will raise our voices in a hymn of praise for God's great kindness in giving us the gift of feeling. But even that does not mark the end of all our benefits. Another of the values which remains is --

The Sense of Taste.

I got a chuckle out of the story of the timid soul who dropped into a cheap hash house one day because his usual eating place was crowded. He sat down and waited for service. He waited and waited and waited some more. Finally, he signaled the waiter who came over and asked roughly, "Yeah, whadda 'ya want?" The timid soul murmured, "Boiled eggs and toast, please." About a half-hour later the waiter slammed the eggs down in front of him and snarled, "Is there anything else, buddy?" "Yes," said the timid soul, "a few kind words." The waiter's eyes narrowed as he looked around. Then, leaning over, he whispered, "Don't eat the eggs!"

We've all been subjected to food which made our taste buds quiver, but as you have already seen this morning, I am not really talking about our physical senses because sometimes they can be taken from us. What I'm talking about are the spiritual implications of those physical senses.

One of the glories of mankind is the ability to see, not only with our eyes, but with our soul. To hear, not only with these two ears, but with that inner ear which is tuned to the voice of God. To feel, not only with our hands, but with our heart and thus to sense our spiritual needs and to

long for their satisfaction. And then, on the basis of that awareness of our need, to reach out and taste for our self the sweet riches of God's presence within our life.

“To taste -- and see that the Lord is good!”

As a human being made in the image of God, you possess a gift which is owned by no other of God's creation - the gift of choice. You possess the right and power to accept or reject the bounties which God has placed before you.

By choice, you can receive Christ into your heart and thereby taste the full flavor of joy and peace.

You can feed your soul upon the Bread of Life so that even though all else be taken away, and you are left with even less than the barest essentials for survival, you can still give thanks to God for His great kindness. What we've said of sight and hearing, of feeling and taste, can also be said of

The Sense of Speech.

Many years ago, Helen Keller showed us one need not have a glib tongue in order to speak to the world in which he or she lives. Though deaf, mute and blind, there has been an eloquence about her life which has given meaning to every Christian virtue which no words could bring.

The old adage, “What you do speaks so loud we cannot hear what you say,” has never lost its cutting edge. The world is much more concerned with our demonstration of the Christian life than it is with our declaration of the Christian truth, no matter how great that Truth may be.

In the life of St. Francis of Assisi, there was a moment when he said to a monk of his own order, “Brother, let us go down to the town to preach.” The young man was delighted to be the chosen companion of St. Francis on a preaching expedition. They passed through all the principle streets, down the byways and alleys, out through the suburbs and so back again to the gates of the monastery. The young man said, “You have forgotten, Father, we went into the town to preach.” “My son,” said Francis, “we have been preaching while we walked. We have been seen by many.

Our behavior has been closely watched. It was thus we preached our morning sermon. There is no use walking anywhere to preach, unless we preach as we walk.”

As an individual you do not possess any greater treasure than the capacity to identify yourself with something greater than yourself so, through a kind of personal suggestiveness, when people think of you they will think of the things for which you stand.

Corn Kernels - Drumsticks - And God's Kindness.

Yes, we have so much to be thankful for this season. So much more than just material blessings. For should those blessings be taken from us, should all of our physical benefits be stolen away -- We will still be able to see and hear and feel and taste and speak. We will still possess the values which are cut from eternal cloth. We will still have a soul—a spirit—which, when it tastes of Christ, is born to never die.

In one of Graham Greene's novels, an atheist is heard to sneer to a poor, little Christian woman who had lost her home and her loved ones, “What has God ever done for you?” His words cut deeply into her already broken heart, but after a moment of reflection that saintly child of God replied, “I'm alive.” “But what if you lose your life? What if you die?” he asked. “What if I die? What if I die?” For a moment she rolled that question around in her mind as if searching for an answer. And then it seemed as if a light from heaven focused upon her face. A radiant Christ-like smile swept across her countenance, and she answered, “If I die? Oh, Sir, that's the best of all. If I die, I will have eternity with Him.”