

The Grand Island Community Thanksgiving Service hosted by St. Timothy on Sunday evening, November 22 was a very rich experience. The music, message and fellowship was superb. Over 100 attended. The Neighbor's Foundation of Grand Island received \$394 from the offering along with some canned goods. The women of St. Timothy provided a splendid dessert buffet. Following is the message delivered by Pastor Hunneshagen. Printed elsewhere is the particularly poignant Litany of Thanksgiving submitted by Pastor Nader Awad of Island Presbyterian Church from their hymn book.

“Ageless Advice”
by
Pastor Dean M. Hunneshagen

Text: Deuteronomy 26:1-19 and Matthew 6:25-43

On the occasion of a National Day of Thanksgiving, some “ageless advice.”

We call it a “day of thanksgiving.” We might well call it a “day of gratitude.”
Gratitude is at the heart of any thanks-giving.

We call it a “national” day of Thanksgiving. That is note-worthy. It gives all faith communities in our land, and those outside of faith communities, the encouragement to dig deep, latch on to any deep seated gratitude that may be within and to give thanks. That would be a healthy thing to do...for ourselves and for our nation.

As an American day of gratitude, I would like to share with you some “advice” (it may be better called “instruction”) from another time and location. I call it “ageless” because the advice is surely timeless and appropriate for any time or circumstance that merits giving thanks, expressing gratitude.

There are six pieces of “advice” for incorporation in these moments: five from the mouth of Moses and one from the mouth of Jesus.

The six are:

1. give an offering
2. claim your geography
3. acknowledge your roots
4. celebrate with joy your good fortune
5. care for those who are without
6. don't worry so much

1. Give an offering. It is hard to be grateful when you are feeling stingy. Gratitude spawns generosity, not stinginess. Moses' instruction was to take a portion of your harvest to the place of worship and offer it to the Lord. In fact, it was to be from the “first fruit” of the harvest. Right off the top, before anything else.

There is a tendency to cling to what we have as though it were “mine.” It is not yours. It belongs to the one from whom it comes. So get over it. Release your grip and out of gratitude give an offering!

2. Claim your geography as God-given. So often we humans want to invoke a “geographical solution.” If only we were elsewhere, life would be better, our aspirations

could be achieved, our problems diminished. Moses instructed his people that the moment they stepped into the land where they were to settle, they were to declare: “This is the land the Lord our God gave us. A land of milk and honey.” I don’t know if you have ever seen “the promised land”; but it doesn’t all look like a land of milk and honey. Yet it was to be regarded as such; and, more importantly, as having been where they had been placed by the Lord.

The sense of “this is it.” “It is from the Lord” can have a profound effect upon how much one feels satisfied...and grateful.

3. Acknowledge your roots. God’s hand has been present in everything you have become. Moses had the people recite repeatedly the history of their journey...of how they got to where they had gotten. Only by God’s hand had they arrived! There was a God-focus in their being. They were who they were because of God.

It is no different for you and me. Were it not for God, we would be nowhere. Gratitude from which thanksgiving comes is rooted in God’s mighty hand of deliverance. If we forget that, we are doomed as a nation and as individuals.

4. Celebrate with joy your good fortune. Gladness is a key ingredient of gratitude. The mood is upbeat. The joy is deep. Moses said the whole community should celebrate with joy the harvest that God has made possible.

Gratitude begs to be given expression in joyful celebration.

5. Care for those who are without. Moses instructed that a generous portion of one’s good fortune was to be given for the care of those who were without resources: the un-landed priestly tribe, the widows and orphans, even the aliens in the land. No one was to be neglected! A culture of care, of mutual care, must prevail. Genuine gratitude dictated that this be done.

In tending to the needs of others, generosity, born of a generous spirit, is to be the standard. Tight-fisted, begrudging, resentful giving is not a mark of a grateful heart.

6. Don’t worry so much. Everybody is concerned about having enough . There is always the fear of not having what is necessary. Yet, Jesus warns about that attitude. “Is worry the proper focus,” he asks? “Shouldn’t you trust the heavenly father more?”

God’s provision is often more than we need. At the very least it is enough in almost all cases. Worry harbors within it dissatisfaction. It harbors the thought that what may be enough is not enough. The antidote: be grateful for what you have instead of always worrying that what you have won’t be enough.

We call this event tonight a “**Grand Island** Community Thanksgiving Service.” The message, as well as the event, has as its first application Grand Island.

So how does the “Island” stack up in relationship to the six points?

Far be it for me, a relative newcomer to the island and certainly one who is viewed as an outsider, to say very much on this score. But some things are pretty apparent:

1. Grand Island, through its churches encourages “giving a gift.” The emphasis upon first fruits giving is pretty standard, I would guess.
2. True Grand Islanders very much claim this land as the place they want to be and as theirs. Never-mind thinking of leaving and going somewhere else. This is it!
3. Grand Island acknowledging their roots, acknowledging that God has placed us here with a purpose...this I am not so sure about. Certainly, Grand Island looks fairly “religious.” There is an ample number of churches that are visible. Maybe even some not so visible ones. But appearing religious is not the same thing as being deeply rooted in the Deliverer.
4. Having joy? I would guess that one is fairly strong. Given the tone of this evening’s event...the sound of music and friendship, you seem to know how to celebrate with joy.
5. Grand Island being postured to care for those without? If the Neighbor’s Foundation is any indication, maybe we are. I suspect the greater caring for the needy actually is embedded in each of our church communities. On the other hand, there is an isolation spirit afoot here, fueled by a conspiracy of silence that may be hiding the deeper needs of our community. Hence, caring for those without may not be as strong as we care to think.
6. As for worry, are Grand Islanders a worrying group? You tell me. How do we rate? Probably fairly average in that score.

Nevertheless, we are here! We are grateful. We feel it and want to say it. So, for the moment, we will set aside all worry. We will rejoice in the Lord’s bounty and give a gift to help those who are without. We will acknowledge that this Island is a good place to be. But best of all, we will thank God for being our God, for his redeeming love in Christ Jesus, and the hope with which we live day by day because he is in our lives and in our community.