

Sunday, November 23, 2011
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Thanksgiving Sermon — “Worry Not – Give Thanks”

I believe that the opposite of worry is gratitude.

When we spend time counting our blessings it steers us away from worry.

Our forbearers, these pilgrims that we celebrate this week were people who knew how to keep the focus on blessings.

As a congregation they had left England for Holland seeking freedom to worship as they chose.

After a time in Holland a number of them decided to immigrate to the New Land to establish a community where they could worship, unfettered by local laws and customs.

Their beloved pastor, John Robinson, decided to stay with the remnant in Holland.

He bid them farewell with these words, "God has yet more light and truth to break forth out of his holy Word."

Robinson's blessing was meant to encourage the pilgrims to adapt to whatever they found – not to expect things to be a certain way.

He wanted them to know that, no matter what their circumstances turned out to be, God would be with them.

These pilgrims came through a difficult time.

They set ground at Plymouth Rock on December 11, 1620.

Their first winter was devastating.

At the beginning of the following fall, they had lost 46 of the original 102 who sailed on the Mayflower.

But the harvest of 1621 was a bountiful one.

The remaining colonists decided to celebrate with a feast.

They invited 91 natives who had helped them survive their first year.

It is believed that the Pilgrims would not have made it through the year without the help of the natives.

The feast was perhaps more of a traditional English harvest festival than a true "thanksgiving" observance as we know it.

It lasted three days, so they must have enjoyed each other's company.

As we heard from Edward Winslow's account "although it be not always so plentiful as it was this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want."

So far from want.

What a great expression.

Our reading tonight encourages us to notice how abundantly God provides for the birds and the flowers.

Food and water, sunshine – all of the things they need to live are provided.

Our writer tells us to worry not about such things because God knows what we need.

Those early pilgrims gathered at the table to give thanks, not just for their food, but also for their very existence.

There are several important lessons for us in these words.

Our lives are so far removed from peril and danger that we don't often express gratitude for the very fact that we are alive.

Last month when many of us went without electricity for a number of days, we were terribly inconvenienced but by and large few of us were in life threatening situations.

When we talk about scarcity –it is most often in terms of wants, not needs.

Again, when we view our lives through a lens of abundance, rather than scarcity, our hearts are grateful.

I think one of the most important lessons in the early Thanksgiving story, and the one that I see reflected here tonight, is the importance of community.

The Pilgrims had come to this land with a particular set of skills and gifts.

Unfortunately for them, the demands of the climate and the terrain were not adequately met by their abilities.

In order to survive they had to admit that they needed help and they had to seek that help.

The Native Americans, those who knew this land with their heart and soul, chose to share their knowledge and come to the aid of the pilgrims.

They didn't have to do that.

They chose to do that.

We too, are faced with decisions each and every day about with whom we will share our gifts.

Abundance is meant to be shared.

The Pilgrims in turn made a choice to share their abundant harvest with their new neighbors.

This is how community is built.

Each person, acknowledging and understanding that they have something to share.

By sharing we wind up with grateful hearts.

In the reading that we heard from Reverend Carter we are told, “the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind.”

These are the daily choices that make up our lives.

We are always weighing how much attention, power, concern, compassion or love we will give to someone else.

These decisions that we make are ours alone.

The reading from the Hebrew Scriptures told us that “the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.”

The scriptures remind us that we have the ability to live abundantly, just like the sparrows and the lilies.

We can look out on the landscape of our lives and give thanks to God for the abundant blessings, as easily as we can lament the scarcity.

So my friends let us approach our Thanksgiving tables with profound gratitude for the blessings in our lives. Let us commit ourselves to building a community that honors each and every created being.

Let us work tirelessly to understand and embrace one another, for in so doing, we will find ourselves living in God’s peaceful kingdom.

Let us lead with hearts of gratitude. Amen.