

One of the things I always notice when I am on break – and Thanksgiving is no different – is the fact that most people do not go to worship on Sunday morning. I forget this simple fact because typically my Sunday morning routine is narrowly focused. On Sundays, I wake up, drink coffee, put finishing touches on my sermon, dress up and come on in. But as I notice when I am on break, there are other options for people on Sundays. For example, brunch seems to be quite popular. And as I noticed brunch crowds this week, it led me to think that there are some similarities between the brunch scene and church setting.

Humor me here. Let's see what you think. There is **food and fellowship** in both settings. There is **good music and well-developed friends**. There's probably arguing over seemingly miniscule decisions in each setting. And in both places, there is a sense of culture where shared value systems are on display. Restaurants take up collections of items for people in need during the holidays, just like church-folk do in many congregations. There's also the approach to food. While brunch may be more attuned to the locally sourced ingredients in their coffee cake and bacon, I know that both groups would readily support the use of fairtrade coffee.

And ultimately, brunch folks and church folks would find themselves on the same type of pilgrimage. Did you know, it was a late Benedictine monk in champagne region of France who perfected the quality of bubbly wine – Dom Perignon. So, yes - the brunch crowd and church crowds do mix. Perhaps that's why it's so easy to find us one Sunday choosing brunch and the next week attending service without much thought between the two.

Now, despite all the similarities, there are of course differences between Sunday morning brunch and church. The main difference being Jesus Christ. Worship of course solely exists to gather around the proclamation and response to the WORD. This answer could silence any further questioning, and we could move on from our comparisons. But Jesus Christ in the flesh was at home in all scenes and settings in his world. He debated the strict regulation of Sabbath practices. He loved and served wherever he found himself. So, Jesus invites us to drill down a bit more. What is it exactly that makes these Sunday morning rituals so different?

Well, what about this practice of gratitude? Another thing that I noticed over the holiday week. When we **brunch**, we open our mouths about our weeks, our work, our food, our complaints, our social media, our children, our community's approach to this or that. It sounds more selfish than it is. We all need to unload. It's not at all bad. But it is different than what happens in worship.

When we worship, we open our mouths and praise the Risen Lord. For example, church, you have opened your mouths at least five times since we started twenty minutes ago, and it has all been praise. In the call to worship, "Let us enter God's gates with thanksgiving and praise! In our opening hymn, "Let All Things Now Living" a song of thanksgiving, now to our creator eternal now raise! Even the assurance after our confession "In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Alleluia! Amen!" All we do in worship is echo the first note of gratitude. We praise.

And sometimes it is hard work, the practice of gratitude. One of my favorite authors, Thomas Reynolds, is a theologian and the father of a child on the autism spectrum. He wrote *Vulnerable Communion* about our need for each other and for authentic inclusion, and it he makes a profound comment about what we do as Christian believers. He says, "The whole point of

Christian Discipleship is to receive the gift of life without regret.”

We practice this work of gratitude when we come to church and worship on Sundays. You know how it goes. It's the Sunday after a major holiday, so I'm preaching to the choir here. Whether we've lost a job or won the lottery, in worship we offer praise. Whether we've lost a loved one or celebrated the birth of a grandchild, we open our lips to declare God's praise. Even when our hearts are not in it, our lips mouth the refrain: Holy, Holy, Holy! We may not always **feel** thankful in worship, that is true – but we don't get an option B for the Call. We come to worship and we praise. We praise. We Praise.

In the past, our ancestors held the belief that expressing gratitude to God was a response to the specific gifts bestowed upon them. This hierarchical approach, reminiscent of medieval times, involved the practice of expressing thankfulness to lords and ladies. In this community-based performance, individuals knew whom to thank for a particular gift. This practice was known as targeted gratitude or the norm of reciprocity.

Here's how popular theologian Diana Butler Bass describes the old tradition in her book, *Grateful :The*

Transformative Power of Giving Thanks. Let's say it's the middle-ages and you survived an epidemic, well then God had spared you. If you found a bag of silver under a tree, God had directed you to find it. If you saw a breathtaking sky, God has given that vision to you personally. These targeted gifts from God seem to come in a direct and magical fashion, like a box under the Christmas tree with a name on it, signed, "From God."

And with the norm of reciprocity, the appropriate response was just as direct. For surviving the epidemic, thank God by saying a prayer and lighting a candle. For the bag of money, donate 10% for a new stained-glass window in the belfry. Importantly, remember God is the Heavenly Benefactor, the One who gave you everything you needed and only wanted your thanks in return.

Now, listen even if its outdated, I'm not above moving in this way. Anybody else rooting for the Eagles on Monday? Or offer up a prayer for making it home without a wreck when you got off the interstate? But this concept of targeted asks and specific thanks, **raises** some important questions. For example, remember that epidemic, why were you saved and not your children? And that bag of silver? What about the person who lost it and now cannot pay the rent?

It turns out the norm of reciprocity, sets up God to be quite temperamental. God comes across as a moody Lord from the medieval ages: granting life or doling out punishment on whim. And through the years, this has turned many well-meaning people off of the idea of God altogether. Maybe some of those people out there at brunch.

But there's good news here. That's not the only or even the primary description of God's good gifts in scripture. And it's not how we offer praise in worship. Look at our passage for today from Matthew. It says, "Our Father in heaven makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." Or in James when he says "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

While Jesus does some targeted miracles and specific healings, scripture shows much more often that Jesus grace is just poured out for all. Jesus speaks of a wildly untargeting God— one who fills the cups to overflowing for wedding guests who have already had wine. He is the one who throws a party for the prodigal and issues

wedding invitations to the people in the streets. He's the one whose heals when the woman just touched the tip of his robe in desperation. He multiples fish and bread so that thousands might eat, not once but again and again.

To a massive crowd relentlessly pursuing him, he showers blessings: "Blessed are the poor! Blessed are those who hunger!" Standing up on an ancient hill, Jesus yells out "Presents for everyone!" You are fearfully and wonderfully made – you are made – so we praise, we praise, we praise.

Friends, hear this good news. We do not worship a targeted, gift-giving God who is handing out goodies and wants thank-you notes in return. God's giving is overflowing; God's goodness is the light that touches all; God grace is untargeted. God's gifts are not obligations to be repaid; rather, they are gifts to be enjoyed.

The table we gather around on Sundays – is the *table of the Eucharist*. Did you know this word actually means gratitude in Greek? Technically, it could also mean thanksgiving. It means well favor or good grace. That's the difference between the church crowd and the brunch crowd.

And it is good and right and our greatest joy. Because we don't deserve this table. It is our gift. We don't earn god's love. We are lavished in it. We don't construct our identity. We are born beloved children – fearfully and wonderfully made. So we come to worship. We tune our mouths. And we praise. We Praise. We Praise.