

## From This Corner

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### **“What’s in your Basket?”**

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11

Most of us would think that we know how to do Thanksgiving. Kids have told me that they know how to do it too. In their special time during worship they have told me again and again that it has to do with turkey. Hands down this is the most prevalent answer. I have never prepared a turkey by myself, and this is something for which I am thankful. I have helped my wife Brenda a few times and it included sticking my hand into the thawing turkey and pulling out a packet of miscellaneous parts. She trusts me with the big jobs! That in itself probably pales to dealing with a freshly killed bird, having to pluck it, and gutting it as our ancestors supposedly did. I don’t even want to think much about it. Again, I am thankful I don’t have that meal preparation. In fact, if I did not have Brenda I probably would get a frozen turkey entrée, microwave it and call it sufficient. Your observation that my life is better with her is quite right. I am thankful.

Being a theologian, however, I have always been inclined to think that Thanksgiving ought to be more than turkey or even thankfulness for family. I have always done children’s times in worship hoping that one time some little Debbie or Ted would say something more profound than “turkey!” On the other hand, what can we expect, since essentially most of our traditions have to do with turkey and family. Beyond that in a moment of religious thoughtfulness we might write a check to the local food cupboard or soup kitchen so those less fortunate might also have their turkey.

One of the Biblical passages that I believe sheds light on how we could improve Thanksgiving is Deuteronomy 26: 1-11. There the instructions are to take a basket of first fruits to the priest whereupon he would place it on the altar. Ronald Clements, professor of Old Testament at King’s College in the University of London, states that most of this passage sets out an appropriate expression of thankfulness for the immensity of the gift “that the divine choosing, calling, and preservation of the nation made possible.” (The New Interpreter’s Bible, volume 2, p. 479) I like his phrase “immensity of the gift.” As I reflect on my own life and the privilege of living in the United States, I do begin to appreciate the “immensity of the gift” God has given and I am nudged toward a better response than “food, family, and football.” As I reflect upon the “immensity of the gift” that was given us in Jesus Christ, I am motivated to a lifetime response of thankfulness to God.

I invite you to consider with me the immensity of God’s gifts lavished upon us and how we might respond. I then invite you to find what you would like to put in the basket described in Deuteronomy. Let us then take it to the place where the focus of attention is upon God, and hand it “to the priest to put on the altar.” I have always understood that to be the high holy moment when the ushers pass me the “basket” or “offering plate.” It

is that wonderful point in worship when we can make a response to the gift of the Word and all the other blessings that have come our way.

So on Thanksgiving you may find me helping Brenda prepare a turkey, spending time with loved ones, and yes even watching a little football. I like those traditions. However, you will also find me considering what to put in my basket to offer this coming year. I have come to see Thanksgiving as a time during which God asks, "What's in your basket?" When I take mine to the place where the focus is upon God I know it needs to be full. How about you? What's in your basket?