

Beyond mashed potatoes

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This week at [Theology Pub](#)

we discussed Thanksgiving from various angles. I found it an interesting topic because giving thanks — and gratitude in general — is certainly not unique to people of faith. Apparently, the religious origins of the first Thanksgiving(s) [are debatable](#), but in later years Thanksgiving certainly took a more religious tint. Abraham Lincoln's [Proclamation](#) calling for Thanksgiving to be celebrated by all states on the same day (as opposed to previous practice) is filled with religious overtones.

I'm struck that giving thanks, as a concept, is perfectly well and good (it's what our mother taught us, after all) but complications come with the follow-up questions, the second part of the sentence, the: so what?

Giving thanks....to whom?

Giving thanks...for what?

Giving thanks...by oneself or together?

Giving thanks...our of obligation, or out of true gratitude?

Shirley Guthrie's *Christian Doctrine* is the most accessible and thorough introduction to Reformed Theology that I know. I go back to it often. Like the other theology texts I consulted in preparation for Theology Pub, neither "thanksgiving" nor "gratitude" is in Guthrie's index. I did, however, find this glorious passage that's stopped me short this Thanksgiving week:

Everything we have said about satisfying our creaturely necessities and enjoying creaturely pleasures is true only to the extent

that we remember that God is not only our Creator but the Creator of all human beings, and that God's good gifts are given not just to us and our kind of people but to all people. To deny these gifts (necessities and pleasures) to any person or group, or to support any political or economic system that does so, is rebellion against the Creator who said that the physical-bodily life of every human being is good. Christian Doctrine, Shirley Guthrie, p. 160

Thanksgiving, after all, is an act. It's action, but in our normal cultural parlance it seems as if it's all about stopping, looking back, reflecting with our kin. At Thanksgiving, many of us end up asking that question, "What am I thankful for?" But Guthrie seems to want to broaden our thinking from "I" to "we."

What if Thanksgiving is not about what God gives me, but about God's gifts to all the world, now and forever? Thinking of Thanksgiving in this corporate manner then pushes us further to consider Thanksgiving as action, as call to discipleship. It becomes more than about feeding the homeless turkey and mashed potatoes on Thursday, but about making sure all my brothers and sisters — all those whom God created and loves — have equal opportunities to enjoy God's gifts. Or, further even, we follow our call beyond making "opportunities available" for all to perhaps enjoy God's gifts, and instead we don't stop until all are resting in the promises of God, not just possibly doing so, but actually doing so.

For me, the Advent season always takes on a wonderful sense of justice-seeking. As I prepare for Christ's birth, I'm reminded every year that our world looks all too un-Christlike. This year, however, I'm getting that feeling a little early through the more secular Thanksgiving holiday. For that, I'm grateful; to that, I hope to respond.

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