

## **Around The Table: Thoughts of Thanksgiving**

Recently my wife's relatives were visiting. Most every conversation took place around the table. It was not the formal table, but the table we have used all our married life, the table that still shows the marks of our children who placed their feet beneath it. We had nice sofas and chairs to sit in. Aunt Rosie even remarked she would like to take one of those chairs home. Only once did we sit in the family room to visit.

Food is often associated with people and their fellowship. When asked how do I know I am called to preach, my answer has humorously been that one morning I woke up craving chicken and I knew I was called to preach. I love the story I heard from one of my father's fellow ministers. He was a pastor in Arkansas and like most Arkansans he was an Arkansas Razorback fan. I remember him telling about a time he was at a Razorback game. He said, "I stood up to cheer my boys to victory! And the same time I stood up, a lady stood up in front of me. When she did, she poked me hard in the stomach. I said, 'Lady, you just hit me in the stomach.' She replied, knowing I was a minister, 'Sir, that ain't no stomach; that's a chicken graveyard!'"

As our hearts and minds are flooded with thoughts of Thanksgiving, followed by Christmas, perhaps it is no coincidence that Christmastime is also the time associated with the Feast of St. Stephen's. Then, right on the heels of Thanksgiving and Christmas is New Year's, another day the families gather at the table. Christmas will be a time of turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce, ham, yams, sweet potatoes, green bean casserole, peas, corn on the cob and pumpkin pie. I am not in favor of changing the name from Thanksgiving to turkey day. We still need to be thankful, even for the turkey we eat. All the glory goes to God for His benefits. "*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits*" (Psalm 103:2). As we gather around the table this Thanksgiving. Let us ask ourselves, what is the attraction?

### **1. The table says I'm accepted.**

The first time the word "table" is mentioned in the Bible is in Exodus 25:23 which says, "*Thou shalt also make a table of shittim wood: two cubits shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof*" (Exodus 25:23). The revelation of this table came to Moses at the same time God gave him the Ten Commandants, "*And look that thou make them (the Tabernacle furniture) after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the (Exodus 25:40).*"

The law was given to set a moral standard and create civility in an uncivil and fallen world. The law also shows us that we have sinned and need a Savior. Paul said, "*...I had not known sin, but by the law... the law...*" (Romans 7:7). "*For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me*" (Romans 7:11). Thanks be to God, in the same revelation of the law, God also gave us the Tabernacle, which was the way back to God. It was here God explained in detail about the sacrifices, the altar and the mercy seat, in other words, the way back to God. Among the artifacts of the Tabernacle was this Table of Shewbread. God was saying, come back to Me. Come back to fellowship. He was saying, as long as the blood has been shed for your sins, we can talk. Now Christ has died once for all for our sins and through Him we can sit at the table for fellowship. "*To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the bel(Ephesians 1:6).*"

I raved about some of the foods and desserts made by some of the ladies in our church. Let me just list a few: Mrs. Deihl's coconut pie, Mrs. Neece's apple pie (she has won several state championships with her apple pie), Mrs. Lord's special cake, my mom's chicken and dumplings, my mother-in-law's chocolate éclairs and my own wife's peanut brittle. Walter Arevelo has been unconscious for about six weeks, nearly dying more than once. Forty-eight people in our area had the

same diagnoses, forty-seven died. He was telling me tearfully and thankfully yesterday, he was the only survivor. Walter has been so sick, that he has lost a great amount of weight. Get this; he is under doctor's orders to eat three thousand calories a day! Word circulated back to me that we could take him some food. I took him an enchilada dinner! So, after having the first conversation in about a month and a half, we did so around food. I said, "Walter, don't forget to eat your dessert." With a smile he mistook the praline patty for my wife's peanut brittle. He began to smile as he reminisced about eating the peanut brittle every Christmas. You know what the table means? It means we are accepted. Walter and I laterally leaned over the enchiladas and embraced. The food said you are accepted back to the land of the living, back to the will of God.

This is why holidays mean so much. It means you are accepted. Hardly anything can be more emotionally painful to know that you are not invited to a Holiday meal hosted by someone you love. Holidays are a good time to make amends and welcome the prodigal home. The table says, you are accepted! "*And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found*" (Luke 15:23,24).

I originally heard this story from Paul Harvey. Although I have heard different versions, this is the one I recollect. A young son had been incarcerated for some ten years. He had been arrested so early in his youth for mischief that he had turned criminal. Oh, how remorseful he was for the wrong he had done that caused him to be imprisoned. One of the great regrets was the deep pain and embarrassment he place upon his fine up-standing family. So great was the shame that he sincerely wondered if his parents would ever forgive him. He wrote home, saying, "I know I have disappointed you. I shall be coming through town on the 3:00 train. The train passes your house shortly before it pulls into the station. If you don't want me to come, do nothing, I'll understand. I'll stay on the train; go to another place, another town and start all over. Believe, me, Mom and Dad, I understand why you wouldn't want to ever see me again. I can promise you this; I will never embarrass you again. If you do want me to come home, there is a way I'll know. Just tie a white handkerchief to one of the limbs on that old oak tree that I presume is still standing. You know, the one I built my tree-house fort in. The one I tied the old tire to for a great swing; that one. The train slows at that bend just before our house. I'll have a perfect view from my window. The day came, the train slowed, with fear and trepidation, he looked. And he did not see one...not one handkerchief. Every limb was covered with white handkerchiefs. It looked like a snowstorm! And beneath the tree, crying for joy that their son was home was Mom and Dad waving a giant white sheet. In my mind I see them showering the boy with hugs and kisses. And can you see it with me? .... just beyond them, a table set with all of his favorite food. Thanksgiving would be good time to say, "Welcome home."

I'll continue these thoughts next week.

- Pastor Pope -

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