

SUNDAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING 2009
Joel 2:23-27; Matthew 6:25-33

RESPONSE ABILITY

CHILDRENS MESSAGE: GODISNOWHERE > How you read it depends on your perspective:
GOD IS NOWHERE --- or --- GOD IS NOW HERE

The way we see things influences how we respond to situations.

When we read or hear the word **responsibility**, to most of us it can seem like a dirty word. It suggests to us the concept of either blame, credit, or duty.

Let me put this sentence before you:

She is responsible for today's dinner.

You could take all three meanings from it:

1. She is a good cook.
2. She is a bad cook.

...no matter how she cooks....

3. She has to cook. (*it's her duty*)

But, let's look at the word in a different way, today...

...in a way which is at the root of all thanksgiving feasts --

-- from the ancient Jewish Feast of Tabernacles - *Sukkoth* -

-- to the contemporary feast we'll celebrate this week.

Instead of the single word, RESPONSIBILITY --

-- let's view it as two separate words: **RESPONSE / ABILITY.**

All of us know that our American festival of Thanksgiving is rooted in that observed by the Pilgrims of Plymouth in 1621.

The feast lasted 3 days, and was celebrated with goose, turkey and deer.

The feast was held, partially in response to the scripture that says: "*when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord for seven days*"....

...And it was partly in response to the fact that the Pilgrims, whose numbers had been diminished by illness and starvation early after their arrival in the New World -- felt they were richly blessed by God.

In short -- they felt they had been give a "response ability." And having that ability, as the strong believers they were, they exercised it -- Sharing their tables with each other,

...and offering thanks to God for bringing them to a new land,
...a land full of promise,
... and thanks to God for watching over them every day.

That's the way the Pilgrims saw things.

And so it was with the children of Israel, who on three separate time of the year ---- during Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkoth --

Passover: a festival of thanksgiving for God's liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, but also an agricultural celebration.

Shavuot: began as agricultural festival, but also commemorates God's self-revelation on Mt. Sinai and giving of 10 Commandments.

Sukkoth: considered a "double thanksgiving" done at end of autumn harvest, and recalls Israelites' wanderings in the desert with they lived in "booths" or "tabernacles".

They offered thanks to God by presenting before God and presenting to God various offerings from the year's crops.

They were offerings that were used both in the Tabernacle and Temple of God -- and then from those places of worship --

-- the offerings were disbursed to all the poor and needy of the land.

Our ancestors in the faith -- from Sarah to Mary -- from Abraham to Jesus...

... all were convinced that **God is the source of everything** --

EVERYTHING!

-- Did you work hard to produce a crop or a profit in your business? From where did your ability to work, to learn and apply your knowledge come?

-- The resources of the earth used to make the materials you use in your profession or craft -- who made them?

All that there is -- comes from the gracious hand of God.

And by graciously giving all things to us -- God provides us with the **RESPONSE ABILITY:**

the ability to respond in ways that God hopes we will use for the good God intends for us, and for the good that he intends for our neighbors, and our world.

God has given us a **RESPONSE ABILITY**:

The ability to respond to God out of a deep sense of gratitude...

...and the ability to respond to others out of a sense of mutual identification that we are all children of the same God.

And we all have this **RESPONSE ABILITY** whether we are considered "well off" or whether we are experiencing times in which our material resources are quite lean.

In hard times -- we still have so much.

We have life -

-- no matter how fragile it may be in our hands.

We have family -- we have friends -

-- no matter how scattered they may be.

We have community -

-- no matter how well it is or isn't organized.

And, **we have the presence of God**, and the **promise of Jesus Christ**.

We have the promise that when we seek first God's kingdom and God's ways of living in this world and with each other...all that we need will be provided.

Yes, we have the **ability to respond** to God's love and grace.

And we **can respond -**

- by offering God the resources that God first gave us...

- by offering God prayer...prayer that he first taught us...

- by offering to God and to each other love...

...the love God first gave us...

- a love that extends to everything God has made...

- a love that extends to all God's creatures...

- a love to all people -- even to ourselves.

Think about this for a moment:

When Jesus told us ***not to be anxious about tomorrow, about what we eat or drink or wear...***

... It was to remind us that we are, **at all times**, blessed by the Spirit of God with many things in our lives...things both material and spiritual.

Thanksgiving is the time we can choose to look at these things...

- the time we can choose to find God speaking to us through what he has given us...

-- and the time when, having sought and found, we can decide to truly thank God for what he has given us...

--- and truly trust God for what he has promised to provide.

You see -- that is what ***seeking the kingdom of God*** is all about.

That's what ***thanksgiving*** is all about:

Looking...finding...and thanking God:

...thanking God in word and deed...

-- out of our ***RESPONSE ABILITY*** --

...our God-given ability to respond out of thankfulness and love.

CALL TO RESPOND ACCORDING TO OUR ABILITIES:

As a young person, I spent Thanksgiving with my mother's side of the family. We would gather at my Uncle Russ and Aunt Shelia's in Titusville.

Our Thanksgiving ritual before the meal was for everyone to share what they were thankful for --

-- and because we knew ahead of time that this is what we'd be doing...everyone gave it considerable thought about for what they gave thanks.

My challenge for us is to do something similar among those with whom we will share Thanksgiving this year:

-- Along with considering for what you are thankful....

...prayerfully consider what is your ***RESPONSE ABILITY***.

How will you be able to respond to God's love and blessings in your life in tangible ways?

-- **What offering of yourself will you make to God that extends his love, and grace, and promise of provision to others?**

You probably received our **Advent Newsletter** over the weekend.

What we are hoping to do during Advent can begin with how we use our ability to respond to God with Thanksgiving.

We can **worship fully.... spend less.... give more.... and love all.**

....In doing so -- we will be ones who use our ***RESPONSE ABILITY*** to the utmost for our God's highest purposes.

...And that will be an offering of thanks and praise our God will truly treasure, and send back for us to bless others in mighty ways through the power and name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.