

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

***Thanks
Living***

*Oh, the days dwindle down to a precious few
September, November...*

Maxwell Anderson

Perhaps more than at any other time of the year, autumn is the season of remembering, of reflection. This season of falling leaves and drier fresh air tinged with the desiccated musk of fading life, a dramatic point of transition from the heated growth of summer to the dormant and necessary icebox of winter—this is the season in which nostalgia rises within us. Thus it is a time of temperance, of slowing down, of contemplation.

For those of spiritual bent, those who claim Christ Jesus as Lord, it is more than just an exercise in recollection, of leafing back, as it were, through the days gone before. No, for us it is a time, oddly enough, of *growth*, as we recall the Lord's work in our life over the past year, and extend to Him our gratitude and thanksgiving, our appreciation and praise for the many graces He has poured into our days with Him.



Giving Thanks

I RECALL THANKSGIVINGS PAST when I ended up more stuffed than the bird from which I had just feasted. I remember being so utterly miserable, holding my bursting belly with both hands, loosening my ever-constricting belt beyond all standards of propriety, imagining myself surely better dead and buried than in my present horrific condition—stuffed to the gills with turkey and mashed potatoes and dressing and green beans and cranberry sauce and (oh, heaven help me) fresh pumpkin pie topped with whipped cream.

I recall being more thankful for the meal prior to the meal, than after.

And I recall ending the day being thankful that the day came upon us only once per year. After all, just how many Macy's parades can one person take!

But every day should be Thanksgiving for the child of God. Every day should be a celebration of joy for having a life guid-

ed and protected by our gracious God.

But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

2 Thessalonians 3:3



Buried in the middle of the book of Nehemiah is an interesting verse.

The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah who was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving, he and his brothers.

Nehemiah 12:8

Israel actually had people officially in charge of "the songs of thanksgiving." That tells us it was something important in the temple, in the congregation of Israel. Thanksgiving expressed to the Lord Almighty was something worthy of leadership.



We can spend hour after hour gathering up our woeful prayer requests, our supplications and petitions, then sending these leaden, insistent missiles heavenward. We can itemize our concerns, crafting detailed lists then handed out to the membership, carefully listing every ache and ailment, every disappointment and sad report, every home-bound, bed-ridden member needing our prayers.

Yes, and we should. Valuable and comforting is the ministry of intercessory prayer.

Yet, where is the joy? Where is the balance between cries for help and expressions of joyful thanksgiving?

Giving thanks is easy, and we all know how to do it. From our earliest memories was a parent telling us to "Say thank you." We were raised to verbally express our gratitude when nice things have been done for us.

But it is more than just courtesy. Thanksgiving—as with most spiritual disciplines—pays dividends. Thanksgiving is just another form of prayer, of communion with God. Without it, we dry up; with it, we retain our vital connection with the God we love and worship.



David was then in the stronghold, while the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem.

David had a craving and said, “Oh that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!” So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water from the well of Bethlehem which was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but poured it out to the LORD; and he said, “Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?” Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did.

2 Samuel 23:14-17

What has been like “water from the well of Bethlehem” to you recently—love, friendship, or maybe some spiritual blessing? Have you taken whatever it may be, even at the risk of damaging your own soul, simply to satisfy yourself? If you have, then you cannot pour it out “to the Lord.” You can never set apart for God something that you desire for yourself to achieve your own satisfaction. If you try to satisfy yourself with a blessing from God, it will corrupt you. You must sacrifice it, pouring it out to God—something that your common sense says is an absurd waste.

How can I pour out “to the Lord” natural love and spiritual blessings? There

is only one way—I must make a determination in my mind to do so. There are certain things other people do that could never be received by someone who does not know God, because it is humanly impossible to repay them. As soon as I realize that something is too wonderful for me, that I am not worthy to receive it, and that it is not meant for a human being at all, I must pour it out “to the Lord.” Then these very things that have come to me will be poured out as “rivers of living water” all around me. And until I pour these things out to God, they actually endanger those I love, as well as myself, because they will be turned into lust.

We should spend as much time in thanking God for His benefits as we do in asking Him for them.

Vincent de Paul

Harvest Home

OUR NATIONAL HOLIDAYS are confusing under the best of circumstances, the whys and wherefores of most having been lost in the stagnant mists of time and traditionalism long ago. Poor Christmas. What young child being raised under even the best of circumstances can work out the meaning of that bipolar extravaganza.

In comparison, Thanksgiving would seem to be an easy case: a time to express appreciation for a bountiful harvest—that is, all good things from the gracious God. But hold on; come to find out that part of this tradition hearkens back to a pagan European harvest ritual from the Middle Ages called “Harvest Home,” in which a “corn dolly” would be fashioned from the last sheaf of grain. This little idol would be held aloft and paraded to the harvest feast, where it would be virtually deified as containing the spirit of a successful harvest.

Oops.

Mankind has dwelt upon this earth long enough to muddle up just about every good thing that began well. A dark side can be found for just about every remembrance in every culture. Traditionalism is born by committee, but traditions are born in the heart. And Thanksgiving is less a calendar date than a condition of the spirit.

I will praise the name of God with song
And magnify Him with thanksgiving.

And it will please the Lord better than an ox
Or a young bull with horns and hoofs.

Psalm 69:30-31

I really don’t care how it began, who did what with a “corn dolly,” or whether the original Pilgrims were Methodists, Baptists, or Hare Krishnas. What I care about is what God cares about: the condition of my heart. Do I love and honor Him enough to give Him praise for everything in my life—to express appreciation and thanksgiving to Him for the overflowing bounty with which He has filled my life?

This year, once again, I will be enjoying Linda’s roast turkey, green bean casserole, the cranberry sauce of her mom’s recipe, and pumpkin pie made from our homegrown pumpkins. And I will eat it all with enthusiasm and joy, because no matter how much of it came from the land, and how much of it came from the grocery store, I know that it all came, first of all, from the hand of my God.

“But I will sacrifice to You
With the voice of thanksgiving.
That which I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation is from the Lord.”

Jonah 2:9



Just a Cat

SHE WAS JUST A CAT, YOU SEE.

A stray. On September 14, 1996, she emerged from the woods and took up residence at our home. She was undisciplined, unintelligent, and scatter-brained. She didn't know what a cat box was for.

She had few if any social skills. Beyond that, time would reveal that she had a list of chronic physical problems, requiring more than the typical number of expensive visits to the vet. So it really was no big deal when eventually those chronic problems reached an untenable point, and we had to put her to sleep.

She was just a cat. Right?

No, Angel was a much-loved member of our family, and her passing nine years later left a new scar on our hearts. More than that, however, over those nine years Angel was a valuable pipeline for God's truth. Through her small life we learned many lessons about God working in our own.

Thanksgiving

A couple of months after she arrived, just in time for the holiday Angel gave me a lesson in thanksgiving. By then her health, so fragile in the beginning, was dramatically improved, she was happier, there was a spring in her step, she was settling into her new home. Her behavior and attitude were improved, and clearly she was grateful.

Earlier that fall, in preparation for the approaching winter weather, my father-in-law and I made Angel a "house" from an old, discarded, cherry picker bucket—the kind linemen work from when servicing power lines. Angel took to her new home immediately. We placed her food and water under the stoop, but rain and weather could still get in through the cracks between the boards and through the steps. So I covered the top of the stoop with plastic, and nailed boards over the open-

ings around the steps. Now Angel had her own protected porch just in front of her house. Now rain would not drip down into her food, and snow would not drift in around the entrance to her house.

Physically, Angel was fairing just as well. Her frost-damaged ears had healed, she had filled out, her coat was thick and luxuriant, and she was filled with energy and vitality, loving to race up the trees in her play.

Looking at her in that improved condition, and running my hand over her filled belly, I could not help but think back to that September day when she traipsed out of the woods and into our lives—gaunt, pregnant, and desperately hungry. When I looked into her shining, attentive eyes, I remember the hollow gaze they had had just two short months earlier. And I imagine that Angel had much to be thankful for.

As do I.

Just as Angel had her benefactors, so I have mine. I have someone who gives me shelter and food, and who cares about my health and well-being. I have someone who loves me, someone who has an interest in my future and my happiness. I can still remember how I was before I met my benefactor.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

Colossians 1:21 niv

But now, because of Him, I am different, I am healthy—I have a future.

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

Colossians 1:22 niv

And so, this year on Thanksgiving day, I will be giving thanks.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:17 niv

Night Visitor

We live in a finite world. As every harried executive and every mother of small children knows, there is only so much of us to go around. Physically, we are bound by the limitations of body weight, size, and muscular strength. Mentally, there is a point at which our intellect turns to mush and the brain cells switch into neutral. Emotionally there is a limit to the number of sad movies we can watch before we're reduced to a quivering, blubbing mass. We are who we are, and there is only so much of us to go around.

We also live in a world bound by strict boundaries of space and time and physical laws. Rise high enough into the sky and the oxygen runs out; stay up to watch midnight arrive, and 12:01 of the next day will surely follow; jump into the air and you will, every time, return to terra firma.



Most nights during her lifetime a possum visited Angel. He was not paying a social call, but coming to check the contents of her food bowl. If any food remained, he

would eat it; if any water remained in her other bowl, he would flip it over. This is what possums do. They go to school to learn how.

Because Angel was a lovable but hopelessly thickheaded cat, she hadn't quite grasped that she had better eat up her food before dark, because whatever was left after sundown would be consumed by the night visitor—and no more would be forthcoming until well after dawn. That's all she got for each day, and if she let someone else eat what she had been given, then she was just out of luck.

We each have only twenty-four hours to each day. We each have only a given amount of energy and stamina, only so much to give before our brain turns to mush. God gives us all the same number of hours in each day, and to each he assigns a given capacity with which to move through each day. The Lord fills up our bowl every day. He says, *Here is your spiritual nutrition, here are the talents and skills I've assigned to you, here is the full depth of your abilities. Now, have at it.*

But each of us also have our night visitor. We each have someone or something that comes to consume what we've not used. Oh, we're lovable and well-in-

mentioned, but we can also be a bit thick-headed when it comes to making the best use of God's riches. So something steals into our life and sucks up what remains, and tips over and wastes whatever it doesn't consume.

And we go hungry till dawn.

I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that nothing is better for them than

to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.

I know that whatever God does,
It shall be forever.

Nothing can be added to it,
And nothing taken from it.

God does it, that men should fear before
Him.

That which is has already been,
And what is to be has already been;
And God requires an account of what is
past.

Ecclesiastes 3:10-15 NKJV

...in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Thessalonians 5:18

I have not always found it easy to practice this duty; this I confess to my shame. When suffering extreme pain some time ago, a brother in Christ said to me, "Have you thanked God for this?" I replied that I desired to be patient, and would be thankful to recover. "But," said he, "in everything give thanks, not after it is over, but while you are still in it, and perhaps when you are enabled to give thanks for the severe pain, it will cease." I believe that there was much force in that good advice.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon



Everything is Always

IN GOD'S ECONOMY, and especially with life in Christ Jesus, everything is always.

"I hate, I reject your festivals,
Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them;
And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings.
Take away from Me the noise of your songs;
I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters
And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Amos 5:21-24

Item: The third Sunday of September is "Wife Appreciation Day,"

an exciting event that gives husbands a chance to demonstrate just how much they love and appreciate their wife. There are so many things that a supportive and loving wife does for her husband, and this is a chance for husbands to look back and remember all the big and little things that add up to so much. Husbands may want to order a beautiful bouquet of her favorite flowers, and/or arrange a fabulous surprise, such as making a reservation at her special restaurant, booking to see a spectacular show; or taking her on a romantic mini-break. Alternatively, they may want to get her a gift of designer perfume or a unique piece of jewelry, both of which are always gratefully received!

DAYSOFTHEYEAR.COM

But if I am not demonstrating on a *regular* basis "just how much [I] love and ap-

preciate [my] wife," what good are my efforts on just one, officially sanctioned, special day of the year in which I am *told* to do it?

Birthdays. Anniversaries. Valentine's Day.

They are all the same—utterly meaningless if we are not living out our love and appreciation every day of the year.



Stated in a variety of ways throughout His word, God makes the point that our enthusiastic appreciation of Him on special occasions just leaves a bad taste in His mouth if we are not living out that appreciation every day of the year.

"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?"

Says the LORD.

I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams

And the fat of fed cattle;
And I take no pleasure in the blood of
bulls, lambs or goats.
When you come to appear before Me,
Who requires of you this trampling of My
courts?
Bring your worthless offerings no longer,
Incense is an abomination to Me.
New moon and sabbath, the calling of
assemblies—
I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn
assembly.
I hate your new moon festivals and your
appointed feasts,
They have become a burden to Me;
I am weary of bearing them.
So when you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even
though you multiply prayers,
I will not listen.
Your hands are covered with blood.
Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight.
Cease to do evil,
Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Reprove the ruthless,
Defend the orphan,
Plead for the widow.”

Isaiah 1:11-17

So now comes Thanksgiving, a uniquely *American* holiday, since it is associated with the Pilgrims who came to our shores so very long ago. These earliest settlers from Europe to what would one day become the United States of America expressed their gratitude and praise to God for their life, and the abundance they were enjoying in their new home.

At a time when society would strip away any mention of faith, of God—and especially dependence on Him—from public discourse, it is heartening to recall that when George Washington proclaimed the first Thanksgiving in 1789, his proclamation was literally filled to overflowing with God, and an appropriate recognition of the root of the holiday in the Pilgrims.

By the President of the United States of America.

A Proclamation.

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor—and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their

joint Committee requested me “to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.”

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be—That we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks—for His kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation...

Given under my hand at the City of New-York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

Thus for both Christians and Jews, the fourth Thursday of November, proclaimed as a national holiday in 1864 by

President Abraham Lincoln, is a special day not just to celebrate the harvest with tables heaped to overflowing, but a day to recognize and give thanks for “the many signal favors of Almighty God.”

Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.”

1 Samuel 7:12

But what good is this isolated annual remembrance if we are not giving thanks to Him every day?

Thanks-Giving

You see, it is a state of mind, really.

It is a mystical, other-worldly, sometimes confusing, sometimes ecstatic, utterly liberating state of mind. More than a belief, more than just a philosophy, far more than just rules or an action, it is a way of life—a way of *living*.

Real, substantial, authentic thanks-giving is the product of a heart that has been broken; not broken in the soap opera, smarmy dime-romance sense—“Oh, my boyfriend’s left me for another girl, sha-na-na.”—but the reductive broken-

ness that results in a life renewed, a life rescued from the abyss. The first step upward toward God is trod upon the shattered remnants of the old self, a life broken, a heart contrite.



Few things today are more alien to modernity. No one trying their best to fit into today’s society is going to subscribe to this (as they see it) antiquated, obsolete concept of thanks-giving. Polite appreciation might be permitted—so long as we don’t get carried away. By all means, show restrained gratitude, a gracious “thank you,” even a hearty slap on the back for a job well done. But this business of brokenness sounds alarmingly like *servitude*—and we just cannot countenance that at all.

But God in His word says something quite different. According to the apostle Paul, we are *born* slaves. The only question is, slaves to what?

Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death,

or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

Romans 6:16

The Christian is not someone who has moved from unbridled freedom into a life of abject bondage, but someone who has simply made the decision for a superior Master.

The work of the Holy Spirit notwithstanding, the believer has made the conscious decision to leave a slaveholder of unimaginable cruelty and depravity, to serve a benevolent Master of unimaginable mercy and kindness. And the best way to serve this new Master is to live a life of thanks-giving.



Our thanks-giving is based on Calvary. Our *faith* is based on the open tomb of Easter morning, for in His resurrection we have the promise of our own. But our life of thanks-giving is based on His once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. Where the Lamb of God’s blood flowed down, there we have the debt we can never repay—a debt God does not expect us to repay, nor even to try.

It may be enough for some, but for the believer actively acquiring the image of Christ as he journeys upward toward God, a life of simple gratitude or thankfulness is not sufficient. There is something primal buried deep inside the soul that clamors to express more. Struggling always against the weak and lazy flesh, the spirit of the believer yearns to be united with the Spirit of God in an attitude of worshipful submission—to express a much deeper gratitude in a life of thanks-giving.

We look upon that ugly and profane cross, that instrument of gleeful torture (for what else can one call a public death by slow asphyxiation and drowning) and our heart breaks. The first child-like response is, indeed, one of thanksgiving and praise for a God who would willingly sacrifice *Himself* for His followers. With that despicable, glorious sight in our gaze, we fall down in grateful worship.

Our praise may be authentic and unselfish, but after a while we realize that it is not enough, not nearly enough. Something in us cries out to express even more for this gracious, sacrificed Savior. Our words, our songs, our corporate devotion are not sufficient to express what lies

yet unexpressed in our heart. We must give Him more than words and songs—we must give Him *everything that we are*. We must come to a point of agreement with the apostle Paul, who wrote,

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

There is nothing else left, nothing that will satisfy our longing, except to be broken. So before the cross of Christ, before the open tomb, before the Father's throne we remove the crown that sits atop our head—that glorious crown that represents every gift we have ever received from above, every talent instilled, every act we have ever performed—and we carefully place it at His feet. As part of our worship we agree with the Lord that He owns us completely. We are not our own. We are His to use as He pleases.

We will now spend the remainder of our days living for Him. Our talents belong to Him. Our will has been subjected

to His. Our desires will be aligned with His. Everything of our lives will be subsumed in His. And we will spend the rest of our lives thanks-giving. 🍃

Sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he sings;
It is the Lord, who rises with healing in His wings:
When comforts are declining, He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining, to cheer it after rain.

In holy contemplation we sweetly then pursue
The theme of God's salvation, and find it ever new.
Set free from present sorrow, we cheerfully can say,
Let the unknown tomorrow bring with it what it may.

It can bring with it nothing but He will bear us through;
Who gives the lilies clothing will clothe His people, too;
Beneath the spreading heavens, no creature but is fed;
And He Who feeds the ravens will give His children bread.

Though vine nor fig tree neither their wonted fruit should bear,
Though all the field should wither, nor flocks nor herds be there;
Yet God the same abiding, His praise shall tune my voice,
For while in Him confiding, I cannot but rejoice.

William Cowper

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