

Thanksgiving Day
Deuteronomy 16: 13-15

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

Giving Thanks in Community:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

I suppose all of us have something that says “Thanksgiving” to us—something that just makes Thanksgiving Thanksgiving. My friend Mary Ellen has a turkey collection. For her the holiday would not be the same without those clay turkeys on her table. For my husband’s family it’s Johnny Brut’s mashed potatoes. They swear no one makes mashed potatoes like Johnny Brut. What is it for you? What makes—what marks-- Thanksgiving for you?

For me it’s a hymn. The hymn John Burke played before the service began. Perhaps you know it. It goes like this:

Now thank we all our God with heart and hands, and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices.
Who from our mother’s arms hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

You can find the hymn I’m talking about on page 397 in the hymnals in the pew. Please join me in singing the first verse.

I’ve been thinking a lot about that hymn this week. I can’t seem to get it out of my head. I think it speaks to our Thanksgiving here in Sonoma and to this community celebration.

“Now thank **we** all our God...” There’s a communal nature to Thanksgiving that goes back to the holiday’s—the holy day’s—earliest roots both here in this country and in Ancient Israel where it was known as the Festival of Booths—the festival we heard about in the reading this morning. In both cases—in Sukkot or the Festival of Booths and in that early Thanksgiving—the whole community came together to give thanks for God’s gifts of food and life—gifts given to a community as a whole. Isn’t it fitting that today we come together as a community to give thanks for the wondrous things God has done in our life as a community, to give thanks for the countless gifts of love God has shown us?

“Now thank we all our God...who wondrous things has done...who from our mother’s arms hath blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.” As I hear these words, I think about the many times they have been sung in communities like our own, the voices raised in song, the people in the pews, the countless gifts of love we all have received in our lives. Take a moment to bring to mind some of the many gifts of love you have received in your life.

When we as a community gather to give thanks, we are reminded that those individual gifts of love are really gifts given to the whole community for they enrich and ennoble all

our lives. They are multiplied and transformed. An act of loving kindness someone has shown you becomes an occasion for me to give thanks. Now thank we **all** our God.

“With heart and hands and voices.” How can we thank God for the many blessings of our lives, the countless gifts of love? With our hearts, with our hands and with our voices. We, as a community, thank God with our hearts every time we live and act in solidarity with one another. We thank God with our hearts when we look not for that which divides us but for that which unites us—our shared experiences as parents; our shared desire to be heard; our shared need for human warmth. We thank God with our hearts every time we listen deeply to one another, every time we tell and hear each others’ stories.

We as a community thank God with hands every time we work together to improve the lives of the neediest in our community. We thank God with our hands when we reach out to one another mentoring the youth of our community and every time we tutor someone who needs a little help in school. We as a community thank God with our voices every time we lift our voice in gratitude and every time we lift our voice in protest of injustice.

On this Thanksgiving Day and every day, let us thank we all our God with our hearts, our hands, and our voices. Amen.