

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

“If you want to teach people **theology** – put it in a hymn and have them sing it.”

So stated one of my Liturgics professors in Seminary – and now some 40 years later, I still see the wisdom in his words.

And so I invite you to look at two of our hymns this morning, and really look at what they are inviting us to do – as we come together on this **THANKSGIVING SUNDAY**.

I. Two Hymns

A. So often we don't really think much about our hymns.

1. They're there to get the service started and ended.
2. Often they're there to “move the action along” – and if we're lucky they help to tie the theme of the service together.
3. Or sometimes, it's just something to get through – and do we really have to sing another one again?
4. But in reality, good hymns – like the ones we have today – bring together uplifting music and powerful texts to take us to another level, to really think about what we are singing and doing.

B. So let's take a look at our first hymn “Come, ye thankful people, come.” – take out your bulletin and follow along, if you like.

1. The hymn was written in 1844 by Henry Alford, who was the rector of a small rural church in the English countryside.
2. It was written for the celebration of the village's Harvest Festival, which much like Thanksgiving celebrates the bringing in of a bountiful harvest.

3. We can see this in the first verse, as it calls the people to give thanks to God for the harvest.

4. The next two verses are based on the “Parable of the Wheat and the Tares” – where the wheat and weeds are allowed to grow together until the harvest when each will then be recognized for what it is.

5. The hymn sees this final harvest as the Second Coming of Jesus – another fitting theme for us as we end the Church Year and look to Jesus’ coming in Advent.

C. Giving thanks is also the theme of our closing hymn, “We plow the fields and scatter” with its booming refrain – “All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above; then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love.”

1. Much like our first hymn, this hymn too was written for a Harvest Celebration – only much earlier in 1782, for a German Harvest Festival.

2. The hymn’s author, Matthias Claudius (1740-1815) was a newspaper man in Germany.

3. The son of a Lutheran pastor, he found his faith slipping away after rubbing elbows with some of the leading philosophers of the day, including Goethe.

4. However, a serious illness caused him to rethink his values and to rekindle his faith.

5. Claudius set out to write a poem rather than a hymn.

6. The poem depicted friends coming to a home to partake in a feast.

7. It depicted God as the one whose generous providence made it possible for those people to enjoy that festive gathering.

8. A British English teacher, Jane Campbell (1817-1878), translated Claudius’ poem, reshaping it as a hymn.

9. Originally, Claudius’ poem had 17 verses, but eventually was trimmed down to what we have today – in fact, we actually start the hymn with verse three of the poem.

10. Again the focus is on giving thanks for the harvest, but is then expanded to remind us that everything we have comes to us from God, and that we need to return our thanks to God for all God's great gifts to us.

II. How WE give thanks

A. As these hymns remind us, God gives us SO MUCH – and often we just take it for granted.

1. In a few minutes we will say the **Litany of Thanksgiving**.
2. There we recount all the many things that we are thankful for and offer God our thanks, “with heart and hands and voices.”
3. We have **so much** to be thankful for.
4. We have a house to live in, and food to eat, clothes to wear – when so much of the world doesn't – even people in our own community.
5. We can be thankful that we didn't lose homes or loved ones to the pandemic, and now can be in a position to help.
6. So, how do we say Thank you?
 - What can we do to say Thank you?
 - What tangible thing can we do to show our thanks to God?

B. Let me make some suggestions of ways that we can show God our thanks for all the many blessings God gives to us.

1. We can make a gift to **Episcopal Relief and Development** for relief – as ERD responds to disasters when and where they happen – whether the recent fires in Northern California, or the storms on the East Coast or the earthquake in Haiti – ERD is there helping in the local community.
 - Just visit their website: www.episcopalrelief.org to make a gift.
2. You could make an **extra gift to St. Columba's** to help us close our budget deficit.
 - At the moment we are still behind on the INCOME side of the ledger, due to COVID and a variety of circumstances.

- We are hoping not to exhaust our reserves as we begin the process of planning for next year's budget.

- Your **extra gift** could make all the differences.

- As we **bless the pledges** this morning, think how you might be able to give a little something extra to the work and worship of God at St. Columba's.

3. Make a gift – in whatever way you can – in **thanksgiving** for all God's blessings this year.

Conclusion

So now we come together to GIVE Thanks.

As we bless and dedicate our pledges, we give thanks for our life together.

Often we say at this time of year: "Stewardship; what we do, with what we have. all the time."

In a similar vein, we might say: "Thanksgiving: what we do, **for** what we have been given, all the time.

So as this 4th Thursday in November approaches, let us give thanks for this place and community, and how much it means to us – and what it was like last year when it was taken away from us – and let us be glad to be together again.

Let Us Pray

Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth: we humbly pray that your gracious providence may give and preserve to our use the harvests of the land and of the seas, and may prosper all who labor to gather them, that we, who are constantly receiving good things from your hand, may always give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. AMEN.