

Thursday is Thanksgiving Day and many of us will be with family
And many of you will be asked to share around the table, telling what you are thankful for
I hate that—it feels like a duty and I don't want to do it

Mindy was teaching the kids at church and they talked about the Israelites in the wilderness
How they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, complaining about their circumstances
Mindy took the kids on a walk around the church—complaining about everything
Then they repeated the walk—telling everything they were thankful for

Several years ago at a pastor's conference, a number of us were sitting around a table, including Jan
Folks were complaining about things back home and how hard it was in the church
Jan stopped us all and asked us if this wasn't our dream job—to be a pastor of a church
Then she asked if that was true, why were we all complaining about everything
It brought us all up short and I, for one, shifted to telling about the good that was happening

There is a real disconnect between our private feelings and what we say and do publicly
I'm grateful for life, but I hate answering the question at the dinner table on Thanksgiving
I feel good about being a pastor, but when we got together, it was a habit to say how hard it was

Individually we feel thankful—but listen to the news and public discourse and there is lots of complaining
It's particularly apparent in an election year when our collective sense of goodness is divided
We don't agree on way forward and talk of "the other" increases
We become frustrated, which gives rise to fear and a sense of injustice—it's not right
We rarely have a community uprising of gratitude and goodness—working together to help others
It often takes a community disaster to bring out the communal positive action

How do we transform this personal goodness and gratitude into communal goodness and gratitude?
When was the last time you gathered in your local community to celebrate together?

We've relegated the societal gratefulness to Thanksgiving Day in homes with family
We're uncomfortable with the history we were taught of Natives feeding grateful Pilgrims
The nostalgic Norman Rockwell painting of a happy nuclear family isn't it either
Stores used to close on Thanksgiving Day—then Black Friday happened
Now we jump start Black Friday on Thanksgiving afternoon
It isn't Thanksgiving—it's the agony of scarcity in the mad rush to get the deals

But Thanksgiving persists—we can gather in community to celebrate the goodness and bounty
We share bounty—blessing that which we have—blessing it backwards and forwards
Like blessing quilts—we bless the whole chain of provision and joy
We can turn history on its head and say Thanksgiving isn't about pilgrims and natives
Where the colonists took from the Native peoples
Like changing Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day
Rather it is about the abundance of a beautiful world with enough for everyone
It is a day for humility, forgiveness, appreciation, and gratitude

In fact, what about a Global Thanksgiving, maybe September 21, World Gratitude Day
Started in Hawaii in 1965 and adopted by the UN, but not widely celebrated yet
A time when all of humanity gathers in gratefulness for life

There are days we do not feel grateful—when we are anxious or angry—when we are alone
When we do not understand what is happening in the world, or with our neighbors
We struggle to feel grateful

But this Thanksgiving, we choose gratitude

Like choosing to fear not and live unafraid—trusting in God...

We choose gratitude!

We choose to accept life as a gift from God—from the unfolding work of all creation

We choose to be grateful for the earth from which our food comes

For the water that gives life and for the air we all breathe

This Thanksgiving, we do not simply give thanks—we choose gratefulness!