

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever.

Yesterday's update talked about how Thanksgiving is aspirational, meaning it expresses a picture of an ideal we aspire to, not something we normally achieve. Everyone is well dressed. The food is homemade and delicious. The table is decked out with candles. The kids have table manners. Everyone gets along. Or if not, at least everyone aspires to realize that picture. Nobody achieves it perfectly; everyone is enacting a variation on the theme tailored to their own circumstances.

Sadly, Thanksgiving has become controversial for a variety of reasons in recent years. Virtually every aspect of the day has come in for criticism. Animal rights activists don't like the focus on killing and eating turkey. Progressive historians think the story of the pilgrims and Indians is a fable to cover for the tragic reality of cruelty and injustice in American history. The focus on consumption seems needlessly wasteful and consumerist. The focus on family togetherness hurts those who are estranged from their families. The traditions and associations tend to be patriarchal with clear gender roles. The whole thing just seems to bourgeoisie, like the clichéd scenes in a Dickens novel. And of course it is hard to remove God from the picture, which is problematic for the irreligious.

If you're looking for things to object to on Thanksgiving, you don't have to look far. But you have to adopt the attitude of a scoffer. A judgmental teenager has a nose for any hint of hypocrisy, but such zeal for purity of motive can actually miss the point. You can hear the complaints. Cleaning the house for company is basically lying to people, as though the house is normally clean. Wearing good clothes is showing off and not being real. Using formal manners is likewise pretending to be something we're not. And don't you know that the day was chosen to maximize the holiday shopping season for retailers profits? It's all a big scam!

Hypocrisy is bad, but the point of aspirational things is not to be fake but to acknowledge a goal. Yes, the story of America is not a warm fuzzy history of good will and cooperation. True. But part of it is, and that part is worth celebrating. Yes, we can't always eat like kings, but once a year we can. Yes, we don't always get along, but making the effort is not being phony but trying to live up to something.

The picture we have of paradise includes a family banquet. Our earthly tables can offer a glimpse. When we act our best at a formal occasion, we're engaged in a pretense with purpose. We're practicing for eternity. We're acting like the people we're called to be in the hope and expectation that one day it won't be an act. Yes, there will always be someone who smirks at the one trying to make a formal toast, or the one who resents good manners, or who always tries to look past the aspiration to find something ugly that they can say is the true reality. But so be it. The existence of Thanksgiving dinners, even if we don't always get to partake of one, helps us to understand our place and role in the grand scheme of things as we give thanks to the Lord who invites us to the feast and whose mercy endures forever.

In Christ, Pastor Speckhard