
There is Always Something to Be Thankful For

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The Very Reverend Sam Candler
A Sermon at The Cathedral of St. Philip
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Matthew 6:25-33

When we are asked to think of memorable Thanksgiving dinners, I know we are supposed to recall huge tables of turkey and dressing, laughing kinfolk, general merriment and good cheer all around. When pressed, we can probably remember the ones we are actually trying to forget, too - the ones when the food was awful, the tempers turned bad, and when we finally gave up.

But I actually remember another dinner, one that occurred just after I was ordained a priest in the church. It was not a Thanksgiving dinner at all, but it sure felt like one. It is my most memorable Thanksgiving dinner because it is the one dinner I will forever be thankful is over!

I was a young priest, around 27 years old, I suppose; and my lovely wife was thankfully younger. Both of us had been raised to be ever so polite, and so we made a great impression on the Episcopal parish to which I had been assigned. Parishes still love young couples, especially polite ones, and especially when one part of the couple is the Assistant Rector.

We were invited everywhere for dinners, and we courageously sallied forth, rarely knowing who our hosts would be, what kind of setting it would be, or who else would be there. The agenda was simply, "Let's get to know the young priest and his wife." Lovely. It's still at the heart of parish ministry.

We were asked to be at this dinner early, for the hosts were early diners. No, 4:30 pm is not too early for us. We immediately noticed that the average age of the five other couples there was a number too high for me to count. We could have been their great grand-children.

The other guests and our hosts were even more polite than my wife and me. They asked if we wanted something to drink, and I eagerly accepted. I thought that, if 4:30 was too early for a cocktail, maybe a small glass of wine would be nice. They didn't offer me a choice. We got prune juice. Actually, I had never had it before, and it wasn't bad.

Our hostess talked incessantly, and with an unfortunate tone that reminded me of a hen being chased around the chicken coop. Like many a Southern hostess I have known, she rarely sat down, thinking that she had to be constantly moving in order to be gracious (not true!). Actually, the house was quite small, and she liked yelling to us -or talking to herself" even when she was in the kitchen right beside us. I have politely forgotten what we had to eat before dinner. I remember the conversation revolved around coin collections.

Suddenly, we heard the voice of our hostess rise to an even more elevated pitch. Something bright in the kitchen caught my eye. Yes, something was definitely on fire. She had been preparing hundreds of special dishes for us - well, at least

15" several with wicker containers for the glass casseroles. Her small kitchen had run out of space, her wicker containers were on the stove, and one of them was ablaze.

As the young and agile priest, I dashed into the kitchen in order to save the day. After more squawking and maneuvering in the tight space, we got the fire out. The kitchen was smoky, but most of the food was already prepared without having been burned.

Here beginneth the procession - the long procession around the sideboard (actually two sideboards) laden with delicious Southern goodies. At this point, I must admit that I am not a fan of many Southern goodies. I actually do not like pickles, and at least half the dishes were pickled something or another. The second chapter of every Southern meal always begins, "Have a little more of this, have a little more of that." I was desperately trying to find something without pickles.

We passed the largest silver casserole around the table while we were sitting, all twelve of us around a table meant for about six. Actually, this silver casserole frame was designed to hold a wicker container and then the glass inside dish; and it didn't quite fit right. In fact, its original wicker holder had burned up. But our hostess pressed forward, even if the glass dish was rattling inside the large silver frame; there was no more wicker basket to hold the glass dish.

I had neglected to notice that I should grasp both the silver frame and the ill-fitting glass casserole dish, at the same time, when it came around. So, when I politely took only the outside silver frame instead, the entire glass inside fell through the frame and smashed my plate to pieces. I was horrified, and I immediately pushed my chair back and stood up to prevent further damage. As I did so, my chair hit the crowded sideboard behind me. Another crash resulted; every plate and dish standing so handsomely on its shelves fell flat - or fell completely off.

Much more squawking and cackling ensued. I was trying to be helpful, but I was rather wedged in between a sideboard, three chairs, a table, and much broken china. It was not a pretty sight for the new young Episcopal priest. Of course, when the clutter and clatter had subsided, we still had to actually partake of the dinner.

And now, for some reason or another, the house had run out of china plates. I will just use a paper plate, I insisted; that would be safer. The hostess would hear nothing of it. I had to eat on her china, or what was left of it. So I used a small dessert plate. Now I had to arrange 15 different items on a four-inch plate. Lovely.

I remember little of what else occurred at that meal (though my wife probably does). Actually, we might have had a bit of sherry at dessert. If so, it was not enough to forget the grand dinner, full of frantic fire and crashing chinaware. I will never forget it. And I will never be so thankful for a meal to be over than I was for that one to be over.

So, enjoy your meals this Thanksgiving, from the smallest meals to the grandest, no matter what age the guests are, no matter what people sound like, no matter how many pickled things are served, no matter what burns up, no matter what comes crashing down on you, no matter what you have to eat on, no matter how clumsy the Episcopal priest is. No matter. The idea is to give thanks. Give thanks. There is always, always, always, something to be thankful for - even if you are giving thanks that it is over!

AMEN.

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