

As we enter into the week of the turkey, let me share with you the story of my family's most memorable and ill-fated Thanksgivings, a Thanksgiving to go down in history. It was somewhere in the early 2000's when Jon and Kristin decided that they were at a serious enough point in their relationship that they were going to start sharing holidays—thus came the first Thanksgiving where she was in upstate New York and there were Jenn, my mom, and I trying to decide what we were going to do for some turkey. Were we really going to make a massive dinner for the three of us? Should we invite other people over? What should we do?

Well, my mom decided it would be a blast if got a hotel and went up and had Thanksgiving in Frankenmuth. It's this little, unique city in Michigan, a German-themed town with a throwback vibe and is home to some of my favorite fried chicken and one of the world's biggest Christmas stores. We think yes, let's do it. We'll get away, it'll feel special, there are great restaurants, this will be fabulous. Y'all...it was awful. We sat in this restaurant, with the Lions game playing in the background and everything just felt...off. Frankly, it was the most depressing Thanksgiving dinner any of us have ever had. Sad little turkey in our sad little booth, and it wasn't even that the food was bad, or that something awful had happened to ruin the vibe, it just wasn't the same because it wasn't *ours*.

It was in moments like that that I realized how much my family was a *team* when it came to holidays. We all had our assigned roles and it made the day not only flow but feel like it was uniquely ours. This feeling has only grown as we've all gotten older. Thanksgiving requires my mom making her mashed potatoes in the crock pot, mixed with cream cheese and drowning in butter, but with a small unadorned bowl set aside for Lisa. Jennifer is always and forever in charge of pies, which she will always say she is disappointed in, and now that we celebrate Thanksgiving in conjunction with Sebastian's birthday, she is also in charge of bringing the cake. There has to be a tiny little dish of green bean casserole just for Kristin because the rest of us don't eat it. I am in charge of sweet potatoes, now that I have finally perfected my tweaks to Paula Deen's recipe, and finding appropriate vegetarian appetizers so Jenn doesn't think too much about the turkey. It's a lot of Cheez-Whiz and my mom lamenting that we never got my grandma's recipe for creamed corn pudding. It's who we are, together, as a family that makes the day what it is, no matter what day we actual celebrate. Without each other, it's just another meal. We need what each of us brings to the table, literally and figuratively, for it to be complete.

So often, we have a tendency to run away from the book of Revelation because it frankly gets a bad rap. I'm inclined to blame the surge of

popularity of the Left Behind novels in the late 90's/early 2000's, but I think it's also because as a culture in general we have an obsession with the end of the world, and Revelation sounds like the perfect playbook for knowing how this is all going to go down. It doesn't matter that Jesus has told us we won't know the time or the date, that there will be birth pangs, we think Revelation just lays it out there for us of what we are to expect and what we expect are dragons and trumpets and seals being broken and the mark of the beast on the head of a monster. Yet, we are also a culture that loves stories like *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, epic fantasies where ultimately, even after a lot of setbacks, good triumphs over evil, the wicked are thrown down and the heroes prevail to win the day. Call John of Patmos the Tolkien of his day if you will because what Revelation is at its core is a dramatization of good versus evil with the ultimate aim of giving people hope when they feel like there is none.

John was writing to seven church communities who were facing extreme oppression and persecution. They were assailed by the Roman Empire at every corner, Christians were being arrested and martyred, they were having to hide their faith and use covert symbols just to know if they were in safe company. Rome's tendrils were tangled amongst every part of daily life and they feared there was no escape, they would always and

forever be in the clutches of this dragon of an Empire and they didn't know what to do anymore, besides possibly give up.

Even if it's the last thing that we associate Revelation with, John writes it in order to give people *hope*. He wants them to know that empire will not win the day, God is greater than evil, and there is no scenario in which their oppressors rule forever. John uses extremely colorful and visceral language to get his message across. God reigns supreme over all the world and no kind of human power will be able to triumph over God's ultimate power, power that is most evident in the death and resurrection of Christ, who will come again to claim the throne of heaven and earth and take it out of the clutches of broken, evil humanity.

It is this aim that gives us passages in Revelation like our second lesson, passages that are laced with beauty, wonder, hope, and promise. This text doesn't sound like the end of the world, it sounds like a gift, God who is, was, and is to come. God who sent Jesus to free us from our sins. Jesus who is the firstborn of the soon to be resurrected and the ruler of all the kings of the earth. This is hope. This is promise. And it is also a stark reminder, because in the midst of all of these promises and descriptions of Jesus, we also get a description of who Jesus made us to be. Revelation takes this beyond just God and Jesus' role, but says who we are created to be

in the aftermath of the resurrection, tells us what the tangible impact of Jesus' resurrection is on our own lives together. Yes, Jesus loves us, Jesus freed us from our sins by dying for us, *and* Jesus made us a kingdom, priests serving God forever and ever, amen. What this dares to suggest is that *we* are part of the hope given to our siblings. That by being of this priesthood of all believers, we are a part of what brings love and hope to those in most need of it. It dares to suggest that how we exist as a church and community is vital to the hope felt by those around us.

Now, this obviously applies to our interactions with those outside of our church walls, our siblings in need, our siblings that we meet and see on a daily basis, but it also comes as a stark reminder that we are this priesthood of all believers *here, in this place*, and how we treat one another, how we interact with each other is part of our calling, part of this hope, part of who Jesus' resurrection helped create us to be, and for as much as we often forget this when we go out into God's world, I fear we forget it when we're here just as much. I'm not sure how much we remember that we're meant to be here to uplift one another, give one another hope, and be a reminder to each other that we are loved, valued, and cherished.

Far too often in the last couple of months, I have had conversations with folks saying that they're exhausted—exhausted by trying to continue to

serve, to find new ways to bring us together, to encourage us to live outside of our walls and into our mission as people of God. I've had more than one person say that sometimes they hesitate to step forward because they're afraid of being told that they're wrong or that that's not how we do things or frankly getting yelled at because they aren't one of the people in charge and so they need to sit quietly until it is their time. We simultaneously put so many expectations on a small number of people, while shouting down the callings of others that we arrive at a stagnation and you're left to wonder, where is God's love here amongst us?

Y'all we were created for mutual upbuilding, for not only seeing but *valuing* one another's gifts without trying to fit those gifts into a specific mold that doesn't step on toes or harm the way we think things should be done because we've never tried anything different. This whole idea of being a kingdom of priests serving God was one of the hallmarks of Luther's theology expounded in the Reformation—the priesthood of all believers, all of God's children being seen, heard, and valued for their ability to lead and to love in the name of God. When we spend more time shouting down the gifts of others, the opinions of others, the way others are trying to serve, then we are failing to live into our calling as this holy priesthood.

We are not the church without all of us, and I don't say that lightly. This takes all of us. And I know, the world is busy and we're pulled in a zillion different directions, but you are needed here, you, with whatever gifts and talents you are able to bring, and we need to remember that we need each other, each and every person here is necessary to the ministry of God done by us the priests of Trinity. Just as my family's Thanksgiving isn't Thanksgiving without all of us around a loud and raucous table, we are not Trinity without each of us, everyone pulling together, everyone supporting and loving one another, no one better than anyone else, open to the thoughts and hearts of each other, in the hopes that we can discern God's way forward. And I'm not saying it's easy, we're going to tick each other off and frustrate one another, but what if for once we let love win? We let our mutual calling win? What if we decided that God's agenda was more important than our own and we took a step back and asked, where is God calling *us* as a community? Where is God asking me to show up and see another one of my siblings for who they are and what they bring to the table? Doing this alone isn't an option, that would in fact be the end of the world. But when we do this together? That is where hope becomes a revelation.

**AMEN!!!**