

So, I feel like, since I am a pastor, either Christmas or Easter should be my favorite holiday.

I am always talking about following Jesus, I suppose one of his big days should be my favorite holiday, too.

But the truth is that neither Christmas nor Easter are my favorite holidays.

Thanksgiving is.

Now, I know that it has a storied past.

I know that it's a painful holiday for many Native Americans, as is evidenced by the National Day of Mourning commemorated each Thanksgiving right here, in Plymouth, MA.

I know that Thanksgiving Day is remembered by many as a reminder of the genocide and continued suffering of Native American people.

I know that the first Thanksgiving wasn't as sanitized as a Norman Rockwell painting or the Tomie dePaola children's book, My First Thanksgiving.

But.

If you think about the intention of the holiday, it's really a noble one.

It's not about militarism.

It's not about commercialism.

It's not about buying candy or costumes or decorations or presents.

It's not about drinking beer, a la St. Patrick's Day.

It's not restricted to only certain people, like Mother's Day or Father's Day.

It's a day for all of us to get together to simply be grateful.

Well, if there's one thing that our society needs a little more of, it's gratitude.

Practicing gratitude reminds us that we have more than we'll ever need.

Gratitude means shifting our perspective from wanting one more thing to appreciating all that we have.

Gratitude forces us to think not about the deficits, but about the abundance in our lives.

And when we think that we have more than enough, that's when we practice generosity.

Now, being generous makes us happier because giving of ourselves, whether our time or money, is one tested way of improving life satisfaction.

So it's not just a warm and fuzzy emotion, gratitude actually has physical benefits and can make us healthier.

One study done at the University of California at Davis showed that people who practice gratitude are happier and they report fewer health complaints (“The Neuroscience of Why Gratitude Makes Us Healthier,” www.dailygood.org).

People who are intentionally grateful also report offering more emotional support to others and they have generally higher goodwill towards others.

The consensus is that grateful people are generally happier, healthier, more generous, and more pleasant to be around.

And this holiday is a day set aside simply to be grateful, usually over a shared meal with loved ones.

Good food.

People I love.

Remembering all that I have to be thankful for.

No expectations of presents or special events to attend or clothing to buy, no fanfare.

That’s my kind of holiday, real time to set aside the to-do list, take a deep breath, and just immerse ourselves in the abundance in our lives.

In this fast-paced world with constant updates and likes and Tweets and the never-ending news cycle, a day set a part to just say ‘thank you’ is what we all need.

So, that’s Thursday. Thanksgiving Day. My favorite holiday. But a few short hours later, we come to Friday.

Black. Friday. To be exact.

Having these two days smooshed up next to each other is enough to give one emotional whiplash.

It's like having the best and worst of our society colliding together in two short days.

Thanksgiving, it represents peace, harmony, gratitude, abundance, giving thanks!

Black Friday. Lord have mercy.

It represents greed. Consumerism. Scarcity. Not enough money.

Not enough products on the store shelves.

Not enough spaces in the mall parking lot.

Not enough time.

Not enough energy.

Not enough.

It's like we all go to bed on Thursday night and wake up on Friday morning, our memories have collectively been erased, all that stuff about gratitude and contentment go out the window and suddenly we need all the things.

It's enough to make one's head spin, and for me, make my heart ache.

I feel like Thanksgiving needs its own PR firm because it gets overlooked by Halloween and then once Halloween is over, the gods of commercialism take us right to Christmas, skipping over Thanksgiving because there's nothing to *sell*.

Sure, grocery stores like it, but that's not enough to propel the whole retail economy.

They want us to buy for Halloween then start buying for Christmas.

Well I say, no.

I am sitting with Thanksgiving because it represents much of what God calls us to embody, including gratitude, generosity and a mentality of abundance.

There is more than enough to go around, this is what Jesus tells us.

We have more than we need, if we have two coats, give one away, sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor.

Give of your energy, help others, serve them, invite them to the table, love them with food, share the bread and the cup with them.

I know Christmas is Jesus' birthday, but I wonder if he wouldn't have preferred Thanksgiving too.

The scripture we heard this morning comes from Paul's letter to the people of Colossae.

Now, Colossae was not a backwater town.

It was a large trade center because it was on a river and was near a big commercial road, which ran from Ephesus to the Euphrates river.

A big highway cut through it, so it had a lot of retail business.

Sounds a little like a different town that many of us know pretty well.

Because it was a bustling city, it was known for its fusion of different religions, including Judaism, Gnosticism and pagan influences.

A Christian community was established there by a man named Epaphras, not by the apostle Paul, he was imprisoned by this point.

But the community was having problems knowing how to follow Jesus' teachings when they lived in such a pluralistic city with all these other religious influences.

The founder of the Christian community, Epaphras, sought out Paul, or one of his students, and they wrote this letter to the people of Colossae.

This letter is known for its exaltation of Jesus.

It also gives specific instructions about how to follow him, because the people were faced with so many other religious influences.

They needed clear direction, because they were faced with so many other messages.

We hardly live in a place, which has homogenous values and religious beliefs, we also receive so. many. different. messages.

Thanksgiving and Black Friday are a perfect example.

On Thanksgiving we're told to be grateful and appreciate all that we have, then go to bed that night and wake up before dawn the next morning to spend all that we have because *that* is what will ultimately gratify us.

Perhaps we, too, need clear instructions, which brings us to today's text.

The directions are clear.

In order to live into Christ's calling, we are to not merely possess but to clothe ourselves in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.

We are to curl up in these traits make them part and parcel of who we are.

If we have complaints against each other, we are to forgive one another.

But above all, we are to wrap ourselves up in love, which binds us together in perfect harmony.

But the scripture doesn't stop there.

It goes on to say, yea, do all that, but also, be thankful!

Be. Thankful.

With gratitude in your hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God, our Creator.

Friends, we have two powerful days ahead of us.

Thanksgiving and Black Friday.

We have a choice.

Which one will we let define us?

Which one will we embody on Saturday and Sunday and everyday after that?

We are a Thanksgiving people, let us live lives which fully express our gratitude for all that we have, not only on the one day set aside for such things, but every day of the year.

When you wake up on Friday, I pray that you'll have the courage to say "no," I am sticking with gratitude and thanksgiving not greed and commercialism.

It's not an easy temptation to resist, but our practice of gratitude has the power to transform us and our relationships, by making us more Christ like, thereby transforming the world.

May you choose thanksgiving today, Thursday, Friday and everyday. Amen.