

Raising our Standards

Ephesians 1:15-23

Thanksgiving has its own set of symbols -- turkeys, pilgrims, pumpkins and Indian corn. But the symbol that best expresses the abundance that Thanksgiving celebrates is the cornucopia.¹ The cornucopia is an ancient symbol used in both Greek and Roman mythology. In some myths, the goat Amalthea, whose milk fed the infant Zeus, was said to have a horn that was always filled with whatever anyone wanted to eat or drink. In other tales the Roman goddess of plenty, named "Copia," always wore or carried a horn filled with fruits and drinks. The magical horn of plenty was always full; its abundance could never be exhausted.



Most of us know a cornucopia life. Our horns are always full. And there's an abundance we know that not everyone in the world knows.



Consider this pile of corn near my home in Iowa. You've heard me talking about how much corn there is out there this year. The crops are phenomenal. Farmers have had a "problem" this year in finding a place to store all the food. Think about those words for a moment: there's a "problem" in finding a place to store all the food. Since when is too much food ever a problem?

It will be a "problem" for many of us tomorrow. We will eat butterball turkeys the size of small children. Eating two desserts will practically be

¹ This information about the cornucopia comes from an article, "Living Beneath Our Means," in *Homiletics*, November 21, 1993.

mandatory. Along with the turkey, cornucopia, cranberries, and football, Thanksgiving's symbol has become overindulgence. This is among the days during the year when we'll give ourselves the day off from diets, calorie counting, and watching what we eat. We'll "belly-up" to the table and we'll all have a problem – too much food.



Other people will have food problems tomorrow too. Though, it won't be too much food, it will be starvation. About 24,000 people die every day from hunger or hunger-related causes. Three-fourths of the deaths are children under the age of five. Today 10% of children in developing countries die before the age of five. Famine and wars cause just 10% of hunger deaths, although these tend to be the ones you hear about most often. The majority of

hunger deaths are caused by chronic malnutrition. Families simply cannot get enough to eat. This in turn is caused by extreme poverty. It is estimated that some 800 million people in the world suffer from hunger and malnutrition, about 100 times as many as those who actually die from it each year.² While we might playfully "fight" over the last piece of pumpkin pie tomorrow, in many places in the world, people like these young men will be literally fighting over a few grains of rice. Food problems.



We'll have other "problems" tomorrow too. I was talking with my mother on the phone on Monday night and she was talking about how they are going to have to stuff 20 people into their small house for Thanksgiving. There's just not enough room in our house for everyone to sit around the table. That will be a "problem many people with have to wrestle with tomorrow. But not everyone.

² These facts come from the website: <http://www.superbabyfood.com/hunger.htm>.



People all over the world tomorrow will be wandering, and wondering, where they'll sleep. From Chapel Hill to the Congo, folks will shiver and scrape together whatever they can to protect themselves against the elements.

And even some of those who are fighting for our freedoms and are the sons and daughters of the richest nation in the world will sleep in mud puddles tonight.



My intentions this evening are in no way to dampen spirits and ruin your Thanksgiving gatherings tomorrow. I only hope to remind us all that in the midst of so much abundance and blessing...living above our means in our physical existence...we are too often content to live well beneath our means spiritually.

In our text from Ephesians, Paul breaks into joyful prayer for the faith and witness of the Ephesian Christians. They know Jesus, and apparently are models for others in the early Christian community.

As we enjoy living well beyond the physical standards of most people in the world, may we also raise our spiritual standards by being the Church God has called us to be. Living thankfully, sharing generously, loving ceaselessly, and seeking the peace of Christ. Amen.