

**- Saint John's Pulpit (Nov. 14, Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost)
- "Thanksgiving Spirit" Leviticus 19:9-10, Ruth 2:15-17**

⁹ When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God. Leviticus 19:9-10 NRSV

**¹⁵ When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, "Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶ You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."
¹⁷ So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. Ruth 2:15-17 NRSV**

Thanksgiving in the eyes of immigrants

Thanksgiving is coming now! I believe that many of you plan your Thanksgiving more actively than the last year as things about Covid are getting better now likewise vaccination, booster shots, wearing masks, and keeping a distance. Certainly, Thanksgiving is one of the popular cultures in America. However, I felt strange when I celebrated my first Thanksgiving with Hannah about 17 years ago in Evanston, Illinois.

Now we are enjoying this beautiful Fall season. Enjoying beautiful color-changing season, expecting harvest this year, and planning family gathering... But Hannah and I were not. To international students and immigrants, Thanksgiving Day was not the one to enjoy, but the one to endure.

Usually, most Korean-American people observe two Thanksgiving Days every Fall. One is their home country (Korean) Thanksgiving Day (August 15

in a lunar calendar, so, usually mid of September or October in our calendar), and the other is Thanksgiving Day in November. Ironically, immigrants or international students are very limited to celebrate this holiday.

They cannot celebrate their Thanksgiving in their home country because they are in a foreign country. On the other hand, they cannot enjoy their Thanksgiving Day in the U.S. like most Americans. In America, they have no place to go, no family or relatives. For international students, their college cafeteria always is closed during the Thanksgiving break. Hard to find restaurants to eat at as most American people celebrate their Thanksgiving at home.

When Hannah and I celebrated our first Korean Thanksgiving Day in the U.S., we walked to one grocery store to give parents a phone call. At that time, we were international students, had no cell phone because paying monthly phone bills was a big chunk of our finance. So, we usually used a telephone booth next to that grocery store to give an international phone call. With a sense of nostalgia, Hannah cried out while she was talking to her mom. My big mission was inserting coins not to disconnect cause of lack of balance. One of my holiday missions was to fill a big plastic bag with coins!

On Thanksgiving Day, some people miss their family who are in their home country, others feel a sense of isolation because they are in a foreign country... However, there were some people who showed great hospitality and generosity to make my Thanksgiving so thankful and warm whenever I meet Thanksgiving Day in the U.S.

One retired Korean-American pastor and his wife always invited my family to their Thanksgiving meals when I was in Chicago. Some of my congregations brought their home food to the church for sharing when I did my ministry in Minneapolis. One of the board members in my seminary invited international students to his house and served Thanksgiving meals when I studied in Kentucky.

At that time, I just thought it was a Thanksgiving party, but now realize that it was Christian love that required their sacrifice. All those who showed the

wonderful hospitality sacrificed their time, energy, and place to serve others who cannot afford to enjoy Thanksgiving.

In general, people tend to understand Thanksgiving is a day of thanksgiving literally for their harvest from God. In the eyes of Christians or religious people, this definition sounds reasonable. Celebrating their harvest and praising God's Grace upon it... is very Biblical as well as religious.

However, what the text today says from Leviticus encourages us to see Thanksgiving differently. It suggests that our harvest should be used for others, especially those who cannot afford it. Instead of celebrating how much we collected, we are asked to think of others and leave some of the harvests for them. A Long time ago, Pastor Mike Slaughter, Senior Pastor at Ginghamburg Church, OH wrote his Advent Bible Study book titled, *Christmas Is Not Your Birthday*. In a similar vein, Leviticus tells us that Thanksgiving Is Not Your Harvest Day! Do you agree?

Yes, the Bible is always challenging us that we need to do something more while others just do their minimum obligation. While others love people whom they love. But the Bible asks us to love the enemy. When people are used to a culture of 'Give and Take', Jesus asks us to just give! In other words, Christians are required to do more than the minimum. Likewise, when people are happy about their harvest, Christians need to consider those who cannot see their harvest and try to do something for them!

⁹ When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God. Leviticus 19:9-10 NRSV

This new perspective for Thanksgiving reminds us of a beautiful story in the book of Ruth. When Ruth, who immigrated to Israel following her mother-in-law, Naomi, she needed to work taking responsibility for her livelihood even for Naomi. So, when Ruth had to work at Boaz's farm for gleaning, which made Boaz deeply pay attention. Boaz concerned about Ruth's challenge in her life and her new setting and asked his young men to help Ruth by leading her to the spot where there was plenty of grain and supporting her

get more grain through invisible help. Thereby, Ruth could experience the joy of harvesting in her life and bring the same joy to Naomi. How? It was through by sharing harvest for others!

17-18 Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. When she threshed out what she had gathered, she ended up with nearly a full sack of barley! She gathered up her gleanings, went back to town, and showed her mother-in-law the results of her day's work; she also gave her the leftovers from her lunch. Ruth 2:17-18 MSG

Thanksgiving, time to pray for another Ruth...

In this month of Thanksgiving, how would you like to make your Thanksgiving more meaningful? One of the ways to make your Thanksgiving meaningful is to think of others who cannot see a harvest in their life. We know that there are our neighbors who cannot celebrate Thanksgiving because of their physical or emotional health, finance, relation, and job concerns. The pandemic had strengthened a bond of family, but it is true that the pandemic had broken down it.

So, churches should be a place where people feel comfortable, gain energy and find hope in their life just like Boaz's farm for Ruth and Naomi. At the same time, Christians should be the ones like Boaz who cared for those who need help. To me, the reason why I could enjoy the Thanksgiving season every year in the U.S. was from helping hands who had a heart for international students and immigrants. Here is one common thing from those helping hands - they did not regard their harvest as their own, but a graceful opportunity to serve others.

John Wesley, a founder of the Methodist movement undergirds why we should be helping hands in his Journal on September 26, 1783:

"Observing the deep poverty of many of our brethren, I determined to do what I could for their relief. I spoke severally to some that were in good circumstances, and received about forty pounds. Next I inquired who were in the most pressing want, and visited them in their houses."

Yes, Thanksgiving is a season to observe our neighbors and to do something for them. It should not be a time to celebrate one's harvest. When one's harvest begins to be shared, God would bless it, and nourish all with His grace. Here is a recap. Let people feel their graceful Thanksgiving. We are called to do this!