

Unitarian Church of Calgary, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009.  
Interim Minister the Rev. Fran Dearman and DRE Sandy Cooper.  
“Thanksgiving: A Multigenerational Service”.

## Homily for Thanksgiving

Once upon a time in ancient Greece, long ago and far away, there was a story—one of those stories where strange things happen. This story was about Erysikhthon, the king of Thessaly, for whom nothing was ever enough. Erysikhthon liked to eat. For him every day was like a Thanksgiving banquet and more.

Erysikhthon decided he wanted to build a huge feasting hall. He cast his eyes upon a grove of fine tall trees. He told his servants, “Cut down all those trees for my new feasting hall”.

His servants protested—those trees were sacred to the goddess Demeter, the goddess of good harvests. But Erysikhthon—his name in Greek means ‘tearing up the earth’—Erysikhthon insisted that every last tree in Demeter’s sacred grove be cut down to build his feasting hall, and so it was done.

One day soon after, Demeter came walking past, and noticed that her beautiful trees had been cut down to build Erysikhthon’s banquet hall. And she was annoyed.

Demeter said to the greedy king that since he liked eating so much, then he could eat all he liked, but no matter how much he ate, he would never feel full. And so Erysikhthon ate and he ate and he ate, but he never felt full, and there was no end to his hunger, and he knew no peace, for he didn’t know when enough was enough. And that’s the story of Erysikhthon, ‘he who tears up the earth’, and for all I know he’s still eating and he’s still hungry.

This idea of enough is difficult for us humans. It is in our nature always to be looking further afield, always to be interested in new things, always to want something more. And this can be a good thing. This is how we are hungry to learn, and hungry to do good in the world.

Fortunately it is also in our nature to be mindful of good things close to home, and to be thankful for what we already have. We look for ways to show our thanks for life, and the people who love us, and the beautiful world we live in. One way we show our thanks is prayer.

Prayer is one of those words that can mean different things to different people.

Some of us pray by taking long walks in the woods, and up into the mountains. We stop and breathe the air, and we are thankful for the beauty of the earth and the splendour of the skies.

Some of us show our thanks by praying aloud. We might speak our words to what we name as God or the spirit of life. We might talk out loud to the universe and the starry skies, or listen to the wind blowing through the trees.

We might talk silently to ourselves, searching for the words to say how we feel today, if we are happy or sad, if we are hopeful or afraid, if we feel lonely or uncertain. Sometimes finding the words and saying them out loud helps us feel more calm, and think more clearly. Speaking the words out loud might help us find the courage and strength to do what we need to do.

Sometimes sitting in silence, breathing in and out, and just being in the quiet is what we want to do. Folks call that meditation.

When I feel scattered all over the place, I sit in stillness and in silence for a while, until I feel more at peace, as if all the pieces of me had come back together.

Prayer or meditation or mindfulness is a personal thing; we do what we do, each in our own way. At Thanksgiving I remember that not everyone has enough. So I remember the food bank and I say thank you by sharing, and that too could be called a prayer for the healing of the world.

It has been said that if the only prayer we ever spoke was thank you, it would be enough. May it be so.

[The legend of Erysichthon's insatiable hunger as punishment for the felling of Demeter's sacred grove is found at Callimachus hymn 6 in the Greek, and at various sites on the world wide web.]

Our closing hymn was written by a Unitarian poet called John Holmes, who lived through the Great Depression and two world wars. He heard some folks said that the only peace we could ever know would be beyond our understanding, in another world. But John Holmes reckoned he did know what peace looked like, peace in this world— to be safe in our own homes and not be afraid, to share a meal, and let the light shine out our windows. He wrote a poem about this kind of peace, and the poem was set to music.

[Hymn # 164 “The Peace Not Past Our Understanding”. Cf Philippians 4:7 KJV “And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep [guard, make serene] your hearts and minds through [in] Christ Jesus.”]