

November 2022 – Pastoral Message

“Almighty God, your goodness comes to us new every day. By the work of your Holy Spirit, lead us to acknowledge your goodness, give thanks for your benefits, and serve you in willing obedience, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.” – Prayer of Thanksgiving, Sundays and Seasons, 2022, p.309

Beloved Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, my family, and friends, in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Every day, I wake up, just like you. I put my feet on the floor, stand up, stretch, and thank my Creator. I thank God for my beloved partner and wife, beautiful five-year old twins, my faithful dog, and another day here in this life. It is a simple prayer, and sometimes I run through the motions and just say it and go from there. But recently, I have been more intentional in not only saying these words, but also reflecting on what they truly mean to me.

This past year has been tough for me, and I am not getting any younger. I look in the mirror and see more lines and things that used to not be there. I am at the age where tests and procedures are now scheduled hard and fast on the calendar. I have been tired, I feel mentally beat up, and though I am a month out, I am still trying to get over COVID. The congestion and the prolonged cough just will not break. My physicians keep reminding me that I am healthy, but somedays I just do not feel it. But in all that has occurred, I am still thankful. I am thankful for my life, the ‘call’ that God has asked of me, the wonderful experiences I have witnessed, and the family that surrounds me as I walk through the door and into the sanctuaries. I am thankful.

Yesterday, during at a packed house at Augustana, I welled up. As we were about to finish worship, a big smile came over me. During announcement time, I was lauded by you, beloved NIC, and thanked for my time and devotion to this three-point parish over these last six and a half years. Members stood and thanked me for so many things, and even more spoke to me quietly on their own. I was thanked for my Sunday responsibilities; not saying anything after someone had died, but still being present and offering that resurrection hope; for mentoring a child or a youth who did not want to be there; for bringing those who love God closer to our Lord, even in times of trouble or conflict; my personalized messages; visiting those who cannot take care of themselves and need a smile; and so much more. But most of all, I was thanked for just being me. And for that, I welled up.

If you know the real me, you know that I am not the one to be in the spotlight. I want others to shine and carry that energy onto others. However, the job keeps me in the spotlight. But I do not see it that way; I see it more as a way of sharing in the light with you, beloved NIC, and letting you run with it. I love to see success come from the smallest of mustard seeds and watching it grow to the greatest of bushes and brambles. That is what I am thankful for.

Today, I am thankful for a three-point, rural parish in the southwestern prairie of Minnesota that has been together for over ten years. I am thankful for a call to a beautiful place and to beautiful people. I am thankful for a Wednesday afternoon/evening program for youth that has flourished to something even greater, and the people that have made it happen. I am thankful for the organ being played on Sunday mornings, and I am thankful for little conflict. (And seriously...that is important. Many of my fellow colleagues are eaten up by this, but that is not going on here.) I am thankful for audio books that occupy my time when I drive, and I am thankful for strong, black coffee as I sit across from you. I am also thankful for those that are reading this, but do not know this about me. Consider this an invitation to ask me to have that Cup O'Joe with you and get to know me some more.

November brings us cooler temperatures and harvest season winding down. We are so lucky again this year where harvest has been safe, and things have gone well. I am especially thankful for that. November also brings us a day where we can sit down together, share what we are thankful for, and pass the yummys that we yearn for each year. Whether it is at grandma's place, on the family farm, in an assisted living community, or alone in front of the television, we still call the National Day of Thanksgiving special. We yearn for Thanksgiving. We look to Thanksgiving. And for some reason, the pumpkin and pecan pie just seem right.

But beloved NIC, I encourage you to channel that 'thanksgiving' into something else: take a moment and recognize how lucky we are. How lucky you are. Recognize that when you get up in the morning, you have a roof over your head, shoes on your feet, and in the fridge...you have something to eat. Recognize that your entire livelihood was not destroyed by a mighty storm or a fire that laid everything to cinders. Recognize you do not have to seek shelter from bombs falling from above, and that your choice at the polls was yours to make, and not coerced by a threat to your life. Recognize that you have made mistakes in life, but for some reason, it seems to have worked out anyway. And most importantly, recognize that you are loved by your Creator God for just being you, and you not having to do anything to make that happen.

May you be thankful for all that you have, what the Triune God has done in and through you, and that I continually keep you in my prayers. Please remember...though Thanksgiving is only a day, it should not stop there. Let us keep thanksgiving alive in our hearts, our minds, and in our souls. May God continue to bless you all and I look forward to seeing you in-person or on-line for worship and out in the community. If you would like to continue this conversation, or invite me to stop by, please get ahold of me and we can talk some more. I like my coffee strong and black.

God bless you all and welcome to November!

In Christ,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish