

This Thursday many of us will be celebrating Thanksgiving. There will be good food and I hope the fellowship of good friends and family. One of those movies that starts being played around this time of year is National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation. Have y'all seen that movie? (**raise my hand**) In that movie Clark Griswold has this fantastic, almost mystical idea about what a good old fashioned Christmas is supposed to be like. I wonder how many of us have the same idea about our Thanksgiving dinner. We ask, "Are we going to have the perfect Norman Rockwell Thanksgiving this year?" Well if we are we had better work our way down the check list. My sisters and brothers, call it out. What do you need to have the perfect Thanksgiving dinner? (**turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, bread, green bean casserole, family, friends, thankfulness**).

My sisters and brothers those are good and fine things to be sure. What I want to know is how should the body of Christ come together for Thanksgiving? What should God's Thanksgiving look like? Who do we invite? How do we get invited to Thanksgiving at someone else's house? When we get there how are we expected to behave? All of these questions are important for a better understanding of this morning's two Scriptures.

Debbie read our first Scripture from Acts 2:42-47. Please, allow me to read it to you again.

Read Acts 2:42-47.

In our first passage the people who came to eat devoted themselves not to being fed, or to looking to see if their favorite food was there, or to sitting with their friends and family. They came with the purpose of being devoted to the Apostles' teaching; to fellowship; to prayer, and then to eat. They came for the Good News of Jesus Christ first and foremost. They came for fellowship. In this case fellowship is about a whole lot more than catching up with friends. Here, fellowship means a mutual association of persons where the relational accounts are adjusted where we each share a portion of the role of growing closer to God, and sharing the Gospel with others. That's what it means to be the Church. It is not just the pastor's responsibility to teach people about God's Word, to raise up children in the way they should walk, to visit, to preach, to bring in new members, and to convince people to tithe. It is the job of the fellowship of believers. When these verses from Acts say they were devoted to fellowship this is what they were talking about. Everybody plays a part to the point the fear of the Lord had fallen on all of them. All who had more sold there excess to be able to help those who were in real need. Day by day they worshipped together in the temple, they gathered together in their homes and ate with glad and generous hearts. I don't know about y'all, but that's what Thanksgiving looks like to me. Everybody looking for ways to grow closer to God, and by doing so growing closer to one another. A true fellowship of believers, a good and healthy church involves more than just the 19 we average in Sunday school, and the 15 who signed up for Disciple on Tuesday nights. The church looks much more like the effort we put forward for the Community Dinner. This past Tuesday night we fed over 250 people. It took close to 40 volunteers and that's not counting those who brought desserts. The Community Dinner this past week was a big deal. Y'all check it out.

Play the Community Dinner video.

If you volunteered to help our community dinner be a success please stand and be recognized. **Y'all give them a round of applause.** We fed a lot of people Tuesday night. There was a line of people out the door. There was a ton of fellowship and just enough food for everyone. However, as I have thought about the meal this week I need to ask, was it a success? If our goal was to bring a lot of people together to eat a great meal, then I think yes. Our Community Dinner was a HUGE success. All of y'all did a fantastic job! Thank you so very very much. I sincerely appreciate all of those who were able to help, and all who came to eat. (**pause**) However, I am stuck with this nagging question. Was the meal a success?

Y'all help me out by answering these questions.

If a restaurant feeds a lot of people does that make the restaurant a success? (pause) **No**. Why? Because a restaurant can give food away all day long. It can be great food. Everybody in town can love the food, but if the restaurant does not make enough money to cover its cost the restaurant will close.

Let's try again. If a real estate company sells a bunch of houses does that make them a success? (pause) Maybe. It depends on how much profit they make on each sale, and whether they can still afford to pay their employees. Making a profit determines the success for both a restaurant and a business.

What determines the success of a church? (pause for responses) Does having a ton of people in church on any given Sunday make a church healthy or successful? Does having the "right people" in church make it a success? (pause) Let's find out.

Our second Scripture this morning comes from 1Corinthians 11:17-34.

Read 1Corinthians 11:17-34.

The church at Corinth fed a lot of people, and I mean a lot of people. They fed so many people they ran out of food. There were a lot of people coming to be fed both physically with food and spiritually by God. The question is were they healthy? Were they making disciples? Were they a success as God measures success? (pause) From Paul's letter it sure doesn't sound like it. There were divisions among them. The rich people were showing up early for a free meal so they didn't have to eat with the day laborers who would eat this meal as their only meal of the day. By the time the rich people left there wasn't enough food left over for the day laborers. As you might imagine this caused divisions among the people. I want y'all to take a hint from this passage for your Thanksgiving meal on Thursday. Hungry people are not happy people. (repeat) Y'all say that with me. **Hungry people are not happy people.** That's right. People who are hungry for food are not happy, and people who are hungry for God are not happy either. Unhappy people are not much fun to be around. That's part of the reason why Paul is scolding the church at Corinth. They were trying very hard to meet a need, and the real need was not being met because those who had more than enough were greedily taking up what the poor in Corinth truly needed. Instead of feeding themselves they should have been feeding others, both physically with food, and spiritually through the power and grace of the Holy Spirit.

My sisters and brothers, this past Tuesday y'all put on a wonder of a terrific meal. We fed a whole lot of people. Many of us worked very hard. When people ask you what our tithe dollars go toward at Central please, tell them about our Community Dinner, and how good it is to come and eat with us. Spread the word. However, inside these walls our Community Dinner is a WIP; a work in progress – No! It's a whole lot better than that. **Our Community Dinner is a wonderful dream in the process of becoming a God given reality.** This past year we hosted four of these Community Dinners. In 2020 we hope to host six community dinners. That is going to take your tithe dollars to make a reality. Thank you so much for what you have already given. Thank you so much for the ways so many of you stepped up to serve. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate what you have already given of yourselves and your time. For our community meals to become a treasured part of the fabric of this community we have to seriously consider what makes these meals a success for us as a church. Does success come from the number of people we have fed with food? Does success come from the number of people in this church who volunteer and get along together? Or does success come from the number of people we touch with the good news of saving grace in Jesus Christ? My sisters and brothers. What will it take to make our Community Dinners a success according to the commands of God the Father Almighty? What will it take from all of us?

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen