Greetings,

Thanksgiving is not always an easy season. Sometimes it has to do with the empty chair at the table or a beloved relative that couldn’t travel home. Sometimes our mixed feelings about Thanksgiving are our anxiety about health issues, finances or struggles in our families. If you happen to be one of those people that finds this time of year difficult, I simply want you to know that I am praying for you today and throughout the week. It is my observation that our culture is in the midst of a transition where we aren’t always sure “how” to express appreciation for the people around us and for the blessings we have received. Therefore, I unapologetically have something to say to you. I am grateful for you today! I’m so thankful for your personality, your gifts, talents and abilities. I am deeply grateful for your stewardship. I celebrate all that you are and all that you bring to this community. I appreciate your thoughtfulness and your creativity. I give thanks to God for you. In a world that tends to be silent when we do everything right and loud or even cruel when we make a mistake, I just want to say that I appreciate and value you for all that makes you who you are in this very moment. My prayer for you this Thanksgiving is that God will fill you with hope, joy, love and peace during this Thanksgiving season. May you enjoy healthy food. May you be surrounded by the people who affirm, encourage and support you. May you have an opportunity to freely celebrate your faith, friendships and family.

As far back as I can remember our family spent Thanksgiving at the Norfolk County Fair in Simcoe. We attended for 15 years and then I was transferred to Harrow Ontario. After being away for close to 7 years I returned to this geographical area and our custom of attending the fair resumed. Indeed, Joyce and I will be spending some time at the fair during this Thanksgiving weekend. I don’t know if I was always conscious of it but the fair seemed to whisper the themes of autumn and shout the themes of our Thanksgiving celebrations. I remember hundreds of autumn displays of quilts, blankets, veggies and an assortment of other displays prepared by pre-schoolers all the way up to seniors. Every painting and every craft displayed the individual’s enthusiasm and celebration of the fall season. Quite literally auditorium after auditorium filled with art, craft and food displays.

Oh my goodness! the food. Every smell and taste of the season was at your fingertips, not to mention at the tip of your tongue. In the last 10 years there has been a full Thanksgiving meal prepared at the fair. The truth is that I avoided this room for years because I was told it was a meal “for old people”. Last year I poked my head in the room to check it out and what a meal! Turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, warm biscuits and pumpkin pie. Now there is a meal to be thankful for. The sights and smells of Norfolk fair are my personal definition of some of the most marvelous things we celebrate this time of year, especially in rural communities.

Without our farmers the fair wouldn’t happen, nor would any of us be gathering all the fruits, vegetables and treats for our meal this weekend. The women and men who get up before sunrise and are still working long after sunset in the fields are clearly some of the heroes of our culture and community. Every time I pick up a vegetable or glance at the fruit, I am grateful for their dedication to ensuring we always have food on the table. This week I invite you to give thanks for our farmers.

This past Sunday I went for a long walk in a conservation area which reminded me of the beautiful country in which we live. My walk reminded me of Psalm 136 which talks about giving thanks for the earth, water, sunshine and moon. I am always amazed at the towering and majestic trees and the sound of birds singing while the rustling leaves are beneath my feet. We live in a beautiful country where we are free to celebrate all the blessings of food, family and friends. May I invite you to celebrate those many blessings each day.

I’m deeply aware of how busy this Thanksgiving season may be for you. May I gently encourage you to give thanks to God for the bounty of creation, the blessing of family and friends and the opportunity to celebrate your faith in a country that allows that freedom to come together as community, to sing God’s praises, hear God’s word and celebrate our faith in Jesus Christ. (Colossians1:3) May I personally invite you to attend worship this Sunday? Your worship committee has helped design the liturgy for Thanksgiving. There are more than 20 participants leading the Sunday morning experience. I believe it’s going to be an amazing worship.

If you prefer a quiet reflective worship experience you could attend the 8:15 liturgy. That is where you will enjoy your favourite Thanksgiving hymns along with a quiet, traditional liturgy. On the other hand, if you would like to experience a contemporary family service, this Sunday morning at 10am is your opportunity to be part of a wonderful liturgy designed by a dedicated and loyal team of people who want to bless your Thanksgiving experience.

I believe that this year’s experience will be filled with spiritual vitality, growing healthy relationships and an anointed ministry. Please join us.

Yours in Christ,

Rev Dr Stephen Hendry