

# *St James United Church*



## Message for October 11, 2026

Thanksgiving Sunday (and joint worship service with St. John's Methodist Society)

"The Reason for Gratitude" - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Deuteronomy 8:7-18; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; and Matthew 6:25-33

Today is Thanksgiving Sunday, and yet at first, today's readings, even though they're the ones given for this day, don't feel to me to be very Thanksgiving-y, at least not as we've come to see this time of year. Culturally, we picture family gatherings, of church family too, or for us of two church families, lots of food to share, reflecting on our blessings, including the blessings of the harvest of field, orchard and sea. As Christians, we also voice gratitude to God, and we get a bit about that in 2 Corinthians. But it doesn't land completely because it's about others giving thanks. Like I said, not what we expect on this day. But when we scratch a bit deeper, they put us in mind of what this day should be about spiritually, not so much inviting us to be thankful to God as to reflect on why we should be.

Let's start with Deuteronomy and Matthew. They both hint that gratitude isn't about God so much as it is about us, and the need to remember who we are, and as importantly, who we aren't. This is the heart of what Moses was inviting the Israelites to recall as they prepared to settle once more in Canaan. It was early days for them to apply what they'd learned in the wilderness when they looked after each other through God's provision, and the land's too. There they knew they were completely dependent on God, but Moses understood how easy it would be to forget that, to begin thinking that all they had was from their own ability, and over time for smaller and smaller groups to think it was about their ability, then, as those groups fell into the temptation to exclude others, next thing you know they'd create the very type of society God had rescued them from. For Moses it was critical that they remember how they needed each other, needed the land too, and ultimately God. The heart of Torah is remembering that no one is alone, not independent or self-made, but part of an interconnected community. This mutual dependence is not just with each other or other humans but all of creation. This was Moses' point as he affirmed that in their new home everything, from springs and minerals to crops and livestock, is a gift of the land and so from God. This was Jesus' point too as he pointed to birds and flowers and how God looked after them. He wanted to assure his listeners of God's ongoing care, to see that unlike how they were treated by Romans and their leaders, many of the crowd living precariously as a result, that God loved each of them. They weren't just expendable commodities but essential for the wellbeing of the whole.

Both Moses' and Jesus' teachings point back to the Book of Genesis when God made the first people and, on seeing them with the rest of creation, said it was very good. We often assume that God is speaking about us alone, that humans are very good, but that not it. It is us in relation to everything else that is very good. Forgetting this gets us into trouble, opening us up to misinterpret what it means to be made in God's image and likeness. So often we think that gives us agency, independence, power. The yearning for that comes later when our first parents ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Being created in God's image is about our purpose: sharing with God in nurturing this world so everything in it can thrive. This too is what dominion is about: our call to take care of the earth, not overtake it, to work with all other creatures rather than against them. But again, we forget and the next thing we know we assume not only are we alone given agency, but only certain humans are.

This is why we need to pause in thanks for the gifts of the earth and each other, not distinctly, as if we aren't part of the whole, but one with it, called into a relationship of love and care. A challenge for us as Christians is how we sometimes see the bible as only directed to the next life not this one, for the future and not about this moment, despite that at the end of Revelation God comes to dwell with us, not the other way around. We sum this up in something I heard recently, that the word "bible" stands for "basic instructions before leaving earth." It feels like a yearning for escape, a reward in heaven, which is understandable in a world where those with much take advantage of those with little. But hold in your mind Jesus pointing to the birds and flowers, assuring the people of God's love for them in relation with creation. He was inviting them to hold a different religious imagination, one rooted in life before the fall and us falling for the myth of independence and power, to trust in God's care, expressed in the care we show one another right now, that we give to the earth and it gives back. "Bible" really stands for "basic instructions for be-loving the earth," including be-loving each other. Our purpose, the one Moses and Jesus reminded us to embody, is to be gardeners of the earth, caregivers of each other so everything can thrive and we share it together.

Which brings us to 2 Corinthians. We pause to give thanks for the gifts we've been given, not to keep them to ourselves but in order to share them. The saying about sowing abundantly to reap abundantly is not to say we simply get back what we give, making it about reward, but to recognize that sowing and reaping are part of a cycle of giving. We are part of that cycle. We'll only thrive in as much as everything is able to thrive. We share not because we're good, but because nothing we have is just ours but from a wider whole, with community and creation. We can be generous because the earth is generous, and it's generous because God is.

That is the spiritual ground of this day, each of us giving thanks for the part we play in looking after each other, not just for a future in heaven but the life we nurture with one another right now, the life we nurture with creation, life in us nurtured by creation through God's generous love. May we pause this day to recall that as we give thanks. Amen.