

# A THANKSGIVING MESSAGE

from your Senior Minister

There is a tendency to think of gratitude & thanksgiving as times of happy celebration. Yet, in one of the ironies of history, the famous *Thanksgiving Proclamation* by Abraham Lincoln was issued in 1863, while this land was enduring the Civil War. It was a difficult time, punctuated by tragic division & fear of the future. To many them, Lincoln's words must have sounded hollow at best. But, by issuing his *Thanksgiving Proclamation*, Lincoln



offered to people in that difficult time a vision of hope. It was a vision grounded in biblical images of faith. Lincoln seemed to understand what so many others could not, & cannot still: that gratitude does not spring from a life of perfect ease & plenty. In fact, if we wait until everything is perfect to give thanks, we will never give thanks. Instead, true gratitude arises from a larger perspective on life. It is thanks for the sun after the rain, for peace after a conflict, & for life even in the face of death or a threat. It is acknowledging the presence and love of God in every season & every circumstance of our lives. Lincoln wrote: *It seems to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged...* Thus an imperfect man in an imperfect land at an imperfect time recognized an eternal truth, a biblical truth: ***the depth and value of our faith depend upon our ability to give gratitude in the difficult times.***

I was struck by our host family in Ecuador this summer. Following every meal (not before), the father in our family would lift his eyes to heaven, often with tears in them, & say: *Gracious, Señor!* Here is a man who has so little that we in the United States cannot even fathom it. It took him 3 years to save for a bicycle (he'll never own a car). He works 11 hours/day, 6 days/week and earns \$25 - \$30 for all his labor. They eat little, his family of 6...& times are always extremely tough for them... but he & they never fail to give thanks. Remember: ***the depth & value of our faith depend on our ability to give gratitude in the difficult times.*** These are difficult times in our land for a multitude of reasons, not the least of which is our economy. However, may we be people with a deep & valuable faith, people who are able to give gratitude in these difficult times, and even in worse times. My family and I wish you and yours have a very blessed, life-giving, faith-empowering Thanksgiving holiday this year.

With love,  
Gordon

## **P.S. RUMORS, RUMORS, RUMORS.....**

I'm sure we've all had experiences of having a teacher whisper a secret in the ear of the first student and having that secret passed around the classroom, person-to-person, until the last person says it out loud as we all laugh hysterically at how much the secret has changed. Only sometimes, we don't laugh! This summer, in the midst of a string of weeks when I officiated at 1 to 2 funerals per week, I said to someone (within earshot of others): "Gee, for a minister who is used to doing 5 or 6 funerals per year, it seems strange to be doing 5 to 6 per month lately." The person asked: "Why did you only have 5 or 6 funerals per year?" I replied: "Because I was serving a much younger church. We had 25 to 30 baptisms per year, but very few funerals."

What a surprise this week to hear how much the rumor mill has twisted those statements! I'm told that people are saying that I don't like doing funerals and that I think our church has too many old people. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. I've officiated at hundreds of funerals in my career and regard it as a gift to be allowed to share life so deeply with people experiencing such a crisis in their lives as the loss of a loved one. I think if you talk to anyone whose family I have served in this way, you'll find out the sheer silliness of this rumor. And regarding old people: I knew well the demographics of this church before I came here and happily chose to come here. Again: talk to the elders of our church & I know that they will gladly put this hurtful rumor to rest.

It's amazing how hurtful and untrue rumors can be, and yet how careless some people are when it comes to spreading them. Please, please, please be sure to check out the facts if you hear something that doesn't ring true, something that sounds like it might be a rumor. And armed with the facts, please, please, please have the courage to stop rumors by confronting those you hear spreading rumors. Confront them with the truth of the matter, and set them straight! And if you can do in front of people, all the better, for they may think twice about spreading rumors again.

You know: living in community with others is never easy, even in the church. But when the rumor mill starts grinding, it makes it so much harder to form and sustain a life-giving, healthy, healing, supportive & loving community. And that's what the church is called to be, isn't it? If we all work together, that's what our *United Church of Christ in Keene* can be for all of us! Let's DO it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!