The most valuable word in any language
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When Mark Twain was at the peak of his writing career, it is said that his magazine and journal articles were worth $5 a word--a great sum of money in those days. One enterprising Harvard graduate student sent Mark Twain a letter: "Dear Mr. Twain, enclosed please find $5. Please send me your best word."

A few days later, the student received a telegram with this single word response: "Thanks!"

"Thanks" may be the most valuable word in any language. It is certainly the word that dominates our thinking during our short and sweet Thanksgiving season. I say short and sweet because no sooner do the Halloween decorations go down, the Christmas decorations go up. Traditionally, one of the biggest shopping days of the year is the day after Thanksgiving. This year, however, several stores are starting their sales on Thanksgiving. The financial pressures which have kidnapped Christmas and turned it into a buying binge have run over Thanksgiving.

To understand Thanksgiving from a faith perspective, we need to detach Thanksgiving from outer circumstances. Thanksgiving is not just for people who can say, "I am better off than I was last year." Or, "I am in good health." Or, "My family is happy." Thanksgiving is giving thanks even in the midst of all that is going around us.

Think for a moment about the first Thanksgiving. During the first winter, half of the Plymouth colonists died. Friendly Indians, however, taught the Pilgrims to fish off the rocky coasts, to plant corn, and to hunt. The following summer and fall brought a good harvest. So, despite all the death and hardships, they held a three-day thanks-giving celebration with about ninety Indians as guests.

Real thanks-giving is a declaration of faith concerning the One who is bigger than our circumstances, the One who can make all things work together for good. Real thanks-giving is based on faith- stance rather than circumstance. This is what is meant when the Scriptures admonish us to, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

In the 1962 Thanksgiving Day proclamation, President John F. Kennedy summarized it well: "Over three centuries ago in Plymouth, on Massachusetts Bay, the Pilgrims established the custom of gathering together each year to express their gratitude to God for the preservation of their community and for the harvests their labors brought forth in the new land. Joining with their neighbors, they shared together and worshiped together in a common giving of thanks. Thanksgiving Day has ever since been part of the fabric which has united Americans with their past, with each other, and with the future of all mankind…It is fitting that we give our thanks for the safety of our land, for the fertility of our harvests, for the strength of our liberties, for the health of our people ... I urge that all observe this day with reverence and with humility. Let us renew the spirit of the Pilgrims at the first Thanksgiving, facing the dark unknown with a faith born of their dedication to God and a fortitude drawn from their sense that all men were brothers. Let us renew that spirit by offering our thanks for un-covenanted mercies, beyond our desert or merit, and by resolving to meet the responsibilities placed upon us. Let us renew that spirit by sharing the abundance of this day with those less fortunate, in our own land and abroad. Let us renew that spirit by seeking always to establish larger communities of brotherhood." Amen!