

## **Brussels Sprouts, Ebola, and Thanksgiving**

Pastor Dawn Hutchings

I'm about to introduce you to one of my childhood nemesis.... (sack of Brussels-sprouts).....

It is Thanksgiving and so most of us will be engaging in a fabulous Thanksgiving feast. For most of us a turkey will indeed be on the menu. When I was growing up, one thing you could pretty much count on was that when my mother cooked a turkey that along with all the other wonderful things that would be served with the turkey, like mashed potatoes and gravy, there would also be the dreaded Brussels-sprout. Let me just say that the sight of a Brussels-sprout on my plate was tantamount to torture. I hated these little balls of green, more than I can tell you. Mom would always insist that we eat them. My brother and I would always kick up a fuss and when we'd complain, my Mother would do what Mothers did when we were growing up; Mom would remind us about all the starving kids in Africa who don't have anything to eat. To which my brother and I would always volunteer to send those starving kids our Brussels- sprouts!

Today, when I open myself to all that I have to be thankful for, I can't help but want to give thanks to the One who is the source of all my blessings, the One who lies at the very heart of reality. My understanding of God as the One in whom we live and move and have our being, helps me to understand that everything is in God and God is in everything. So, I wonder how does one give thanks and praise to such a God? Thanksgiving is certainly easier when you personify God. I have said over and over again that there is absolutely nothing wrong with personifying God. Indeed, it is part of our human nature to personify things. Personification is how we relate to something that is not a person. Personifying God is only a problem when and if we actually begin to believe that God is a person and we then go on to worship the person who we have created. The One in whom we live and move and have our being, lives and moves in, with, through, and beyond us. Which means that each one of us is in God and God is in each one of us, even those of us that we deem to be lepers.

So, as I wonder how one goes about thanking God for the very many blessings that we enjoy, I can't help thinking about lepers and Brussels sprouts. The media is full of news about people who have been lumbered with the same role as the lepers of Jesus' day. As the people of West Africa battle the ravages of disease, I am conscious of the fact that talk of Ebola is about as welcome at our Thanksgiving meals as Brussels sprouts used to be when I was a child. And yet, if we are to give thanks for all that we have, we must recognize that the One to whom we give thanks is also present in, with, and through all of our sisters and brothers who are suffering. So, what form shall our thanksgiving take? Will we sweep the images of suffering from our minds in the same way as I used to sweep Brussels sprouts from my plate and into the garbage? Or will we grow up and give thanks not to some person of our creation but to the One in whom we live and move and have our being?

It took me years and years to learn to love Brussels sprouts, but now I cannot imagine a Thanksgiving feast without them. We all have a lot of maturing to do if we are ever going to learn to give thanks to the source of our being, the One who lives and breathes in, with, through, and beyond us; the God who lives and breathes in all of our sisters and brothers, even those we'd rather not think about let alone touch. Surely our Thanksgiving will move beyond naming our blessings and feasting as we seek new ways to express and enact our gratitude? It is so important that we pay attention to our many blessings. Taking notice and being grateful for all that we have and all that we are is the beginning of the process of thanksgiving.

The One we seek to offer our thanks and praise, the One who is the source of all our blessings is the one we call God. The ancient Greek noun for God, is theos; we get our word theology from it...theology means words or ideas about God. The ancient Greek noun theos, was derived from the Greek verb theo, which means to flow. Our ancestors, described God as the Light that flows through all things. Jesus taught us that God is Love. As followers of Jesus, surely we can begin to understand God as the LOVE that flows through all things. Let our Thanksgiving celebrations open us to the realities of our many blessings and let those blessings flow through us. May our God who is LOVE, flow in, with, through, and beyond us so that everyone may know the One who in whom we live and breathe and have our being, by our love. Let us remember that LOVE flows both ways. Just as surely as our blessings flow through us, so too, the pain of our sisters and brothers flows. If the spread of Ebola teaches us anything, surely it reminds us that we are intimately connected one to another.

Humanity is suffering and the balm that can sooth the pain is the LOVE that lies at the very heart of our existence. Let that LOVE who is the ONE to whom we offer our thanks and praise, flow through us. We are not helpless.

There is so much that we have to offer. For we have been richly blessed. Let us enjoy our Thanksgiving celebrations, by pausing from our regular routines to take some time to count our blessings, let the LOVE flow as we embrace family and friends, and then as the knowledge of our many blessings washes over us, let us act out of the abundance we share, so that the LOVE, the ONE who IS, Was, and Evermore shall be the source of our blessings might flow.

Let our gratitude take on flesh and live among us, so that all may know the LOVE who is God. Let our gratitude live and breathe in, with, through, and beyond us. Let LOVE flow from each one to each one.

As my mother would say, eat your Brussels sprouts; there are people in Africa who would be glad of them. There's work to be done, politicians to be lobbied, money to be raised, aid to be sent, medical teams to be supported, sick to be cared for, grieving loved

ones to be embraced, orphans to be raised, cures to be discovered Love to flow. Only then will our feasting be complete.

Let LOVE flow from each one to each one. AMEN.

**Benediction:**

**Let our gratitude live and breathe  
in, with, through, and beyond us.  
Let LOVE flow from each one to each one.  
As my mother would say,  
eat your Brussels sprouts;  
there are people in Africa who would be glad of them.  
There's work to be done, politicians to be lobbied,  
money to be raised,  
aid to be sent,  
medical teams to be supported,  
sick to be cared for,  
grieving loved ones to be embraced,  
orphans to be raised,  
cures to be discovered  
Love to flow.  
Only then will our feasting be complete.  
Let LOVE flow from each one to each one.  
The power of the ONE who IS  
Our Lover, Beloved, and Love itself  
Flows in, with, through, and beyond you.**