

'It's Killing Us': How Americans Are Ruining Thanksgiving

Few things drive me crazy like Christmas décor coming out Nov. 1. I dislike trying to choose Halloween candy while "White Christmas" plays over the loudspeakers in the grocery store. Looking at Hershey's vs. Nestle when peppermint candy canes are unloaded is unsettling, to say the least.

Businesses are so keen on making money they move quickly from the second-largest commercial holiday to the first. It is like November doesn't exist. If it does, it is only in relation to Black Friday shopping and online deals. In fact, Black Friday is now leaking to Thanksgiving Day. It is common for stores to run specials starting at midnight, the Friday after Thanksgiving. Some even start their sales *on Thanksgiving day* in search of the almighty dollar. Americans hurry through their celebration of thanks to rush out the door to catch the best deal at the mall or on Amazon. Not only do they miss out on an excellent opportunity to pause, but they miss the NFL game as well. Blasphemy! It is as if Thanksgiving doesn't exist, and I think it is killing us.

Indulge me for a minute.

Thanksgiving celebrations are enjoyed across the globe. Our neighbors to the North celebrate theirs on the second Monday in October and started the tradition before we did. (Shoutout to Canada!) Agrarian societies celebrated the harvest each year, giving thanks for the bounty they experienced. A feast or a festival commemorated the hard work of the harvest and the goodness it produced. Pagans, Christians, Muslims, you name it: People give thanks for the good they've received. It turns out, giving thanks and being grateful are good for you.

Recent studies show how being grateful changes how you look at life and even changes your brain chemistry! "Gratitude can have such a powerful impact on your life because it engages your brain in a virtuous cycle. Your brain only has so much power to focus its attention." Why not focus attention on giving thanks?

The art of pausing and practicing gratitude has a long and rich history. It is a global experience, even if it isn't done at the same time and in the same way. The *first* Thanksgiving didn't look like what happens today or even the way we talk about it. Yes, there were Native Americans and Europeans, but it was more like natives taking pity on Europeans by keeping them from starving. It wasn't turkey, but deer meat, which is a bounty to the hungry! That is much to be thankful for, even if they didn't have your grandma's favorite stuffing.

Abraham Lincoln decided, amid the Civil War, to make Thanksgiving Day a thing. All around him and others in the U.S., war, fear, death and uncertainty reigned. He saw fit to pause and to help others pause, despite the profoundly challenging climate everyone faced:

I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility

and Union.

Why are we in such a rush to bypass such a noble endeavor?

It is good for us to pause for more than the 45 minutes it takes for us to chow down on our abundance. It is healthy and even healing to spend time giving thanks to the lover of our souls, even as we sense division in our country. (I would hasten to add it is nowhere near the level of division and vitriol Lincoln and our nation faced. Thanksgiving, even as Lincoln prescribed, offers an opportunity to have those who have suffered much—widows, orphans, mourners, refugees and others—a place at our table. A place to be at peace and partake in abundance. Maybe it isn't just food, but an abundance of love, mercy, grace and peace. Perhaps pausing and taking time to be grateful and give thanks will do more for us than we know.

Let's pump the brakes on those Christmas lights and cinnamon-scented pine cones. Let's embrace the discipline of gratefulness and thanksgiving. Maybe as we pause between celebrating the "great cloud of witnesses" who surround us and the incarnation of our Lord and Savior, our thanksgiving can be a way forward. Maybe it can be a place of gratefulness that heals our minds, our hearts and even our land, and in doing so, pave the way to celebrate the birth of our Savior. {eoa}

Bob Fabey speaks, writes and mentors, helping people to embrace their God-given dignity and give it to others in extravagant ways. An ordained minister based in Arizona, he is the host of 3rd Space Podcast and has just released the book *NotMyJesus*, a humorous yet poignant look at faith, culture and life. Connect with him online at .