

## Devotion, Week of November 16, 2025

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

As I began my grocery list for Thanksgiving dinner, I thought about this ritual that I have experienced for so many years. When I was little, my brother and I would get so excited about this meal that we hardly functioned like normal children. We would watch the turkey come out of the freezer – so big it filled up the entire sink while it thawed in cold water for hours. A bag of sweet potatoes would arrive, along with pecans and marshmallows. My mother always cooked butter peas rather than green beans, a tradition I have carried on, until this year, when my son in love gently suggested green beans instead (which is OK, since he's going to cook the turkey!). But the greatest treats of all were two-fold: my mother's dressing and her homemade gravy. My mother's dressing was incredible, but her gravy was renowned in our family and neighborhood. She could make brown gravy, turkey gravy, chicken gravy, white gravy, red eye gravy – you name it – with no lumps and luscious flavor. I watched her, over and over. I still can't do it right. So it's turkey gravy packets for me.

Now dressing – that became a slight issue when Jim and I were married. Jim's mother also made incredible dressing, and it was slightly different. It was eggier, had more crumbled white bread, and baked up more like a souffle. My mother's was grainer with more cornbread. Both were good, but since Jim always made the dressing, his mother's became our norm. He added pecans to it, and sauteed the onions and celery in butter first. So this year, I will try to recreate his dressing, without him to instruct and taste. Pray for me!

As I think of ritual meals, I'm reminded of the Jewish meals during Hanukkah, that is from December 14-22 this year. Hanukkah commemorates the recovery of Jerusalem from the Seleucids at the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt in the 2nd century BCE. They could only find enough sacred oil to light the menorah in the temple for one night, but miraculously, it lasted for 8 nights. As part of this 8 day celebration, foods rich in oil and dairy are cooked, like fried latkes and jelly donuts.

These traditional foods we eat for ritual meals remind us of God's generosity and boundless love for us. May you think of that as you begin to prepare for your Thanksgiving celebration, hopefully with family and friends gathered together.

*Jeanne*