

# Magic Sweet Potatoes

*Sermon preached by the Rev. F. M. "Buddy" Stallings, Vicar,  
at the eleven o'clock service, November 25, 2010, Thanksgiving Day.  
Based on John 6: 25-35.*

Spoken with audacity that only one who does not cook at all would utter, Thanksgiving is a wonderfully simple holiday. It is not heavily encumbered with religion; in fact, it is largely secular—people of all faith or no faith are generally inclined toward being thankful—and there is very little orthodoxy testing done on this day. If family obligations are required and awful, Thanksgiving is mercifully short. Seriously, only so much damage can truly be done in the time of one long meal, the main course of which is filled with tryptophan, which makes us marvelously sleepy. Even for me as a wannabe vegetarian—I am not even close to one but I would like to be; theoretically I support not eating anything with a face or a mother—but even with that tepid nod to the holiness of vegetarianism, eating a turkey seems totally justified. There is nothing cute, cuddly, sweet or smart about them. They should be eaten. With gusto.

One of my personal practices on this day that make it simple and lovable for me is that I take a news holiday. Like many people who live alone, I am bombarded by self-inflicted 24-hour news. Not on Thanksgiving. The news will be there tomorrow; today I shall eat marvelous food, prepared by others—single clergy who know how to work it have marvelously privileged lives in some ways; I shall see a movie; and I shall gather with you, some of my brothers and sisters around this table, who have come to church simply because you want to—nobody really expects you to go to church on Thanksgiving. It is all quite pure and quite good.

And I shall give thanks, truly give thanks, making every effort for it not to become complicated and ponderous. In his op-ed this morning (I still read the *Times* on this day), Nicolas Kristof resisted the temptation to be a buzz kill by talking about starving children in Africa today while we stuff ourselves senseless. I salute him and shall stand in resolved solidarity of lightheartedness with him. He writes of a marvelously re-engineered sweet potato that grows well in Africa, where our traditional one does not. The success of this miracle vegetable so rich in Vitamin A is phenomenal. Tell that to the folks who fear our molecular manipulation; the fabulous sweet potato, which I have always loved even sans marshmallows, wins the day. And I am thankful.

Eucharist, of which we have gathered to partake, means “thanksgiving.” Among all that this table of grace engenders for us, a place of “solace and strength, of pardon and renewal,” as our venerable prayer book notes, it is first and forever an occasion of thanksgiving.

We approach this table mindfully without the burden of arrogance, suspended if but for a second from our obsessions with knowing, grasping and controlling; and with hope that burns more brightly than even our best of circumstances can truly justify. It is the place for me at which life completes its circle, the place to which we bring the first fruit of ourselves, the unprocessed truth about who and how we are, our occasional selflessness and our crassest bargaining, our righteous indignation and our abject humility—all is found and welcomed at this table.

I am so glad that we have come together today not to puff ourselves up or pat ourselves on the back for being here but to be simply and profoundly thankful together.

Life is not easy; in fact, putting aside all lightheartedness, it is increasingly complicated and on some level for me, I confess, quite filled with fear. When I awoke two days ago to the news of the latest incident in Korea, I felt despair for a moment, wondering if our psyches and souls, let alone our military forces and economy, could survive another war. The discussion can become instantly apocalyptic for me.

Being here in this place will not magically change that; indeed it will not magically change anything. But it does promise the power to change us, to convert us one holy meal, one holy moment, at a time. Conversion to what? Conversion to deeper thanksgiving, needing and, more importantly, wanting less; to true peacefulness in our souls, even when fear could justify protection and punishment; to generosity, the surprise of which delights us; and to greater comfort in and appreciation of mystery and unknowing.

May your presence here today set you on course through this holy time of the year that you will be filled with the peace that exceeds all that we can understand.

In the name of God: *Amen.*

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