

## Welcome a Guest at Your Table

by Scott J. Rubin at UUCSV, Northumberland, PA  
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This week is the Thanksgiving holiday and, like most everyone else, I've been thinking a lot about the "holiday" part. You know, getting together with family, eating far more than anyone should, watching a lot of football, letting the kids stay up much too late, watching the Macy's parade on TV, and maybe doing a little shopping on Black Friday.

About three weeks ago, I was coming back from Washington, DC. I had been down there on business -- one of those trips when I got up at 5:00 in the morning and drove down and back in one day. It had been a pretty productive day, but it had been kind of rainy and gloomy most of the day. Now the sun was starting to come out a little. I was spending the trip home doing a little thinking -- about work, about this sermon, about whatever popped into my head.

I thought about what Thanksgiving means. About how much I have to be thankful for. I wasn't trying to write the sermon or even thinking about words or phrases, just some general ideas -- and, frankly, I wasn't getting very far. Then I saw it, just outside of Gettysburg. Right there, in front of me, a rainbow. Now, I've seen rainbows before, but this was a RAINBOW. It started in the fields of brown corn stalks to my left, and arched high into the sky, where it hit a cloud. But it didn't stop there, I looked off to my right and there, coming out of the cloud was the other side of the rainbow, arching down into another field. I slowed down a little -- there weren't many other cars on the road -- and kept glancing at the rainbow. Or I should say rainbows, because then I saw the second rainbow, just to the outside of the first one -- arching up into, and then out of, the same cloud. The rainbows stayed in my line of sight for at least 10 minutes.

I have a lot to be thankful for.

As many of you know, earlier this year, I left a job that I'd been in for over 10 years and I started out on my own. No clients, no prospects, just the desire to be my own boss, stop commuting, spend a little more time at home, and hopefully find some interesting work. Almost 10 months later, I find myself with a growing practice, doing exactly the type of work that I'd hoped for.

I have a lot to be thankful for.

Two healthy, growing children; a loving, supportive -- and employed! -- wife; a nice warm house; food on the table every night; good friends; an inspiring and thought-provoking church.

I have a lot to be thankful for.

This week I found myself driving back from Washington again. Another 3 1/2 hours in the car with nothing to do. It was early in the morning -- the sun wasn't even up when I started to come home; no rainbows at that hour of the day. But I started to do a little thinking again. Even after the election earlier this month, I found myself being thankful. No, not for the results of the election

-- I mean who can get excited about leaders named Newt, Arlen, Strom, and Orrin? I know, you can't judge a book by its cover. But, hey, I've read the reviews and I don't think this is one I'm going to enjoy.

But I'm still thankful. And it's not just because our new leaders don't include Jeb and Ollie - - what kind of parents would give these sorts of names to their kids, anyway? I'm thankful that we live in a country where we have the right to vote; we have the right to make mistakes; and we can have a major change in our government peacefully and gracefully.

But that was only a little bit of what I thought about this time. My thoughts again drifted to this service. Cindy and I had talked about the service last week, before I went away for a few days. I started thinking about what she was going to do with you -- breaking you up into the First World, Second World, and Third World and distributing food -- and it made me realize that I had always thought of the Thanksgiving holiday in terms of the "holiday" and the "thanks," but I'd never focused too much on the "giving."

As I said, the "thanks" were easy. It's easy to be thankful when you live in the First World and things are going well. It's easy to be thankful when you live in a free country -- not as free as we'd always like, but a whole lot freer than most. It's easy to be thankful when you can choose where you want to live, who your friends will be, how and when and if you will worship God, and who will lead you. And it's easy to be thankful when there's food on the table every night.

That's when I started looking at the "giving" part of this holiday. What was I doing to give some of what I had to others? Sure, I could find nice, white, middle-class ways that I was being generous -- donating time and money to this church; supporting a few worthy causes; trying to work for the good guys. But, I'm sorry, that just doesn't cut it.

You saw what I saw this morning. Three-quarters of the world going hungry. Hundreds of millions of children without enough food; without clean water to drink; with no hope for the future. Even in our own country, the most affluent nation in the history of the world, there are millions of children who go to bed hungry every night.

My message this morning is simple: This Thanksgiving, we must give more than thanks. Yes, by all means, give thanks for what you have. Take a few minutes to think about the many ways in which you are blessed. But then think about those who have none of the blessings that we enjoy. Think about the children starving in Somalia. Think about the grandmothers starving because they've been thrown out of their homes -- out of their very countries -- by terrorists. Think about the families in this country who live in their cars, eat once a day if they're lucky, and can't find work that will pay them enough to afford a house.

Think about how fortunate you are, give thanks, and then give something more. Give some food to a food bank. Donate your time to a shelter. And give some money to help those around the world who you will never meet. You knew the pitch was coming -- I kind of telegraphed that one.

Today's service marks the kick off for the Guest At Your Table program sponsored by the UUSC -- the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. For those of you who didn't participate in this program last year, we ask you to place a Guest At Your Table box on your dining room or kitchen table. We ask you to leave it there for about a month -- until after New Year's. During at least one meal each day -- more often if you'd like -- put some money in the box to feed the "guest" who could be at your table. You can put in as much or as little as you want. Ideally, put in as much as it would cost to feed another person at that meal. Or you can put in the same amount each day -- say 50 cents or a dollar each day -- not exactly a gourmet meal, but you can buy a lot of beans and rice for 50 cents. Then, on January 8th, bring your box to church and we'll take care of sending your contribution to the UUSC.

Putting the box on your table also serves as a constant reminder of the need that's out there. Put money in the box, please, but don't stop there. Look at the box each day -- really look at it; think about it; talk about it. Read the brochure that you got when you came in this morning. Educate yourself, your children, and your friends.

Together, we can turn this Thanksgiving holiday into more than a holiday, and more than just a time for being thankful. We can also make it a time for giving. Please join with my family and welcome a guest at your table this year.