

We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land,  
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand;  
He sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain,  
The breezes and the sunshine and soft, refreshing rain.  
All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above  
Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Fans of musical theater will recognize the words above as one of the songs from the musical *Godspell*, which is currently in revival on Broadway. Episcopalians will also recognize them as words from our rich tradition of hymnody. (Hymn 291, *The Hymnal* 1982)

As I drove in to work one day I heard a recording of this song from the recent revival of the play and then not liking the next song that came on the radio turned to NPR and heard a report on how more stores were planning to open on Thanksgiving Day this year. As I heard this, in the back of my mind was a conversation I had the day earlier with some clergy about Thanksgiving services both in parishes and as ecumenical occasions. Part of the discussion was on how few people attended these services and how many Community Thanksgiving services had also decreased in attendance over the years. I began to think that perhaps this was because, for many of us, the challenges of agriculture, and gratitude for a fruitful harvest on which our life depends, is something that is not a part of our experience. While many of us enjoy home grown vegetables, our life does not depend on the harvest of our own agricultural labors.

Recently, I read a book entitled, "Cultivating Reality; How the soil might save us" by [Ragan Sutterfield](#). It was one of the best theological works I have read in quite some time. What struck me most about the book was its emphasis on humanity as part of creation, specifically that to understand and truly live as God intended we need to embrace the "humus"; that we are, according to the biblical story, fashioned from the earth—an echo of the words we hear as we begin the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return." In doing so we embrace the truth that we are created contingent beings who live by the love and grace of a creative and creating God.

Contrast such a view with the world in which we seem to find ourselves, a world that values independence rather than community, a world of "I" rather than "we". And because the world is based on consumption and accumulation rather than production, gratitude takes a back seat at best. Of course, that world is a human creation not the world created by God.

And yet as Christians we are people of thanksgiving. That is what it means to be a *Eucharistic* people. Thanksgiving is the very meaning of the word *Eucharist*. To live life eucharistically is so much more than simply making regular sacramental communion. It is to be people who know our true place in the cosmos, the place articulated by scripture, not by Madison Avenue.

My hope is that every member of this Diocese will set aside this Thanksgiving Day as a day for gratitude rather than grabbing products off of shelves, real or virtual; as a day of gathering together with those we love and those who may have no place at a table, to feast on God's abundant blessings mindful that God is both giver and gift and that we are dependent on God for all that we are and have.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "S. A. Miller".

The Rt. Rev. Steven A. Miller  
Bishop of Milwaukee