



Trips to my grandparent's house for Thanksgiving was a tradition long before I knew what the word meant. My parents used to go when they were kids to their grandparents. Now with me, and eventually three boys, all wanting a bit more room in the back seat of the 1968 Comet (I laugh just writing that), the tradition I am sure was a nightmare from the beginning for my parents. The nightmare was never that way in the end for any of us though. Why not a nightmare in the end? Well let me explain the images in my mind and in my heart.

In my adult years, I have come to understand that the Thanksgiving and Christmas trips we made in that metallic gold Comet and then the rust coloured 1976 Grand Marquis, taught me about my humanness and God's plan for all of us. I can remember a thousand, "Are we there yet?" not only from me, but from my younger brothers as the car became more populated. Sometimes we weren't even off our street yet and one of us were asking...and in our defense, when you cannot see out the window, a few blocks seems like far enough! The pre-packing and the stress of making sure we had 'everything we need for three days at mémé and p  p  's house' was a daunting task for my mom and her four boys (I include my dad in there because he never packed his own suitcase either!).

I can also remember over the years a hundred detours requested en route to my grandparents. "Can we get some chips at the corner store?" "Can we go to Woolworth's on the way there?" (For what? "I dunno.") "Can we stop for ice cream?" "I need to pee." "I think I'm gonna be sick!" I guess we never wanted to be in the car. We wanted to be anywhere else BUT the car!

When we arrived at that sweet white and green trimmed farm house, there were big hugs and happy smiles. There were days of apple picking and peeling from the acres of trees out back. My memories are full of picking pumpkins from the patch and the last few pears of the season off their trees, taking turns driving the old tractor and the smell leaves being burned in piles out back. There were homemade apple pies and my mem  's homemade (and awesomely greasy) meat stuffing. There were late nights by a campfire and falling asleep in someone's arms and waking up in the morning amazingly in my pajamas, tucked in perfectly. I can still see the long table, lots of family, the good silver and fancy gravy boats and a ton of food...everything and everyone just surrounded - surrounded in love.

Those weekends and family gatherings I am sentimental for now; all but my great aunt (88 years old now) are gone. It's just 9 of us now. My parents, three boys, one daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. From 30 people to 9 people, it's quieter now. Still the same love, just more room at the table and more stories of how it used to be. It's how life is I guess when you get older. (Sadly, no one got the recipe of that meat stuffing from my m  m   before died. Gosh! I miss it!)

God's plan for us as adults is no different than we were kids. When God wants and needs us to change we have no idea about the concept of time and distance. We want all the stuff to happen now. 911 prayers. A midnight prayer with a 7 am deadline. Instant gratification taking too long. ARE WE THERE YET? Yeah, as adults we still ask that exact same question of the One who knows where we are going.

We are so worried we won't have everything we need for the journey. Will there be something I am not prepared for? What if I forget something I really need back there or at home? Will everything be a mess when what I planned to bring isn't enough? As adults, we don't trust God and the Holy Spirit enough. In truth, we have all we need with God.

And the journey...sometimes painful, sometimes dark, sometimes not wanting to go in the first place...just like thanksgivings as a teenager in our grey 1984 Ford Escort. Once we get there though...when we get to the destination that God planned for us...there is instant smiles and joy. We normally forget all the bad stuff along the way. The ending is the best time. That moment when you feel you are right where you belong - surrounded in love...yeah that's God. All the time given to us with family and friends...that's God too!!

For this Thanksgiving when we think of "Do you love me?" Darn right God does...more than our little peanuts of a brain can possibly imagine! Our hearts should be like a metal detector sweeping over our daily lives, beeping endlessly and speedily to all our blessings.

The stars dancing in the midnight sky? Thank you God. You can read this right now and understand the words? Thank you God for the gifts of sight and understanding. Are you breathing without even knowing it right now? Thank you God. If you live until your 80 your heart will pump about three billion times. Your brain, better than any electric generator or computer processor. Thank you God. A full fridge and a roof over your head and a bed to sleep in...Thank you God. A hot coffee? Air conditioning? Pictures from your holiday and vacation? Ice cold milk in your cereal? More than three green lifesavers in a roll? Finding \$20.00 in the pocket of your winter coat when you take it out for the first time? Breaking in a new baseball glove? A sweet thank you card instead of a bill in the mail this morning? A car with gas in it? Legs that let you walk up the aisle to your soon to be wife? Arms to hold your kids? A cold beer on a hot day? Teenagers making the right choices 9 times out of 10? Planes that don't crash? Faithful husbands and wives when they were tempted? The automatic deposit of your work pay? The recovering alcoholic? Movie theatre popcorn with butter! The really painful (but super sweet) dance recital of your four year old? A compliment kindly given to you? A passing grade when you thought for sure you were going to fail? Rain during a drought? Sunshine for your family reunion? Snow on Christmas Eve. A table full at Thanksgiving? Thank you God. THANK you God. THANK YOU God. THANK YOU GOD!

Gratitude gets us through the hard parts of the journey. To reflect on our blessings is to rehearse God's great accomplishments. To rehearse God's accomplishments is to discover God's heart. To discover God's heart is to discover not just good gifts, but the Good Generous Giver. Every good thing comes down from God. Gratitude always leaves us looking at God and away from dread. It does to anxiety what the morning sun does to valley mist. It burns it up. Our 'car trips' are just one of many journeys that get all of us to a great destination with God. Travel safe this Thanksgiving and ALWAYS...go with God!

"Give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20).

By Wayne Lachapelle, Chaplaincy Leader, Notre Dame CSS