

Thanksgiving, 2007  
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Ed Quillen in his *Denver Post* opinion column yesterday morning reflected on the ironies of abundant blessing at Thanksgiving.

One problem with Thanksgiving is that the more you think about things you're grateful for, the more you realize that they are not unmitigated blessings.<sup>1</sup>

In a related way Jesus told a parable, a mashal, a riddle, something to the same effect, if not the same intention.

A certain rich man's lands brought forth bountiful crops. And he deliberated within himself, saying, "What shall I do since I do not have a place where I may gather my fruit?" And he said, "I will do this: I will tear down my granaries and larger ones I will build and I will gather there all my goods, and I will say to my self, 'Self, you have many good things stored up for many a year. Rest, eat, drink, enjoy.'" God said to him, "Fool, on this night they will demand your self from you. And the things which you have prepared, whose will they be."

. . . Therefore, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.<sup>2</sup>

This is not just a gloss on the burden of rich blessings. It exposes the irony that success requiring more barns may not be the blessing it may at first appear to be. Abundant blessing may beg for something more than barns to store it in.

Many years ago, Calvin Ammerman noticed that the pumpkins used in this Thanksgiving display were, considering the size of the room, pretty puny. "You could hardly see them if you were sitting in the pews," he said to me as he unwound his story recently in my office.

So Calvin, beloved retired minister at Augustana for thirty some years, is also a gardner – a really good gardener – resolved to do better. And that began a bountiful tradition. Every year Calvin would plant his seeds, fertilize, and water, water, water until in his back yard he had a suitable pumpkin for use at Augustana for Thanksgiving.

And magnificent pumpkins they were. Each year bigger than the last. Every November the pumpkin crew would store the pumpkin in the storage shed, and increasingly larger crew would wrestle that pumpkin up into this room.

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<sup>1</sup> Ed Quillen, "Thanksgiving Difficulties," *The Denver Post*, November 20, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:16-20, 22-3.

Of course, every year Calvin got better growing bigger pumpkins. Soon they were getting help from a front end loader. The pumpkin patch was becoming a cottage industry.

This fall Calvin had come to see me to explain an embarrassing dilemma.

Chuckling, Calvin explained the whole story. Recent construction next to his back yard garden has resulted in a new yard now almost always in the shade. So Calvin moved the pumpkin patch to the back yard of the church, where there was plenty of sun and available water. All summer Calvin fertilized, watered and cared for that growing pumpkin.

Almost with apology, he explained that “it was by far the biggest one he had ever raised.” “I think it weighs about 400 pounds, but I can’t tell because we have no way to weigh it. I don’t know if I can get it into the church. And once we get it to the church door, I don’t think our crew can manage to move it over the floor. What shall we do?” It was the same question asked by the man who decided to build bigger barns.

Somehow that bountiful pumpkin crop had become a problem. The blessing had become a dilemma.

They rigged up a little wagon on wheels and got the pumpkin into the narthex at the back of this room. As of a few days ago the wI had hoped to at least wheel the pumpkin into the front of the nave for this service, but when I last checked the liturgical arts team had wrestled it off the wagon and on to the floor in the narthex. From now on that pumpkin will not be moved.

Ed Quillen goes on to express thanks for his dog Bodie, who is enough of a nag that Quillen gets in his walk every day.

However, we have encountered dozens of folks who are not the least bit grateful for all this, since when we’re out, Bodie chases cars, trucks, ATV’s, motorcycles, joggers, and just about anything that moves. While I get some excellent deep breathing exercises by yelling at him during these back-country transgressions, for which I suppose I should be grateful, some people have informed me that they feel not even a smidgen of gratitude for Bodie’s efforts to improve my health.

The import of these stories, these mashal, is that just because you and I think we have identified a blessing, just to have received that blessing and thanked God for it may not be all that is asked of us. Ed’s blessed dog is cursed by his neighbors, an abundant pumpkin harvest takes the fruit right out of the display at the front of the church, and a man who takes pleasure at tearing down little barns and putting up bigger ones is foolishly distracted from more important and ultimate issues. The thanksgiving is not over when God’s gifts are acknowledged and God is thanked. Now those gifts must be managed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase is Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 139.

When God is loose in the world, there is more going on just under the surface, about which we have little, or even mistaken awareness. Our lists of acknowledged blessings are just the beginning. In the light of all eternity, we might say, the world is laced with more blessing, more for which to be thankful, than we shall ever know. Let us ask for the wisdom to acknowledge, thank God, and then manage these blessed miracles to the glory of God.