



Where Justice and Truth Meet

November 2022

"Free our hearts to recognize and attend to Christ in hidden and unexpected places." – A Prayer for the Life of the World

A Thanksgiving Address

Words That Come Before All Else

We are all well attuned to the traditional story of Thanksgiving. In 1620 the Pilgrims arrived in the New World and suffered a very hard winter with very little food to eat. When spring came, they began to plant their seeds. Friendly Indians in the area came to help them, showing them how to plant food such as corn. In the fall there was a bountiful harvest, and to celebrate, the Pilgrims invited the Indians to a great feast of thanksgiving.

It is a simple story, meant to give meaning to a well-beloved traditional holiday. It is, however, one side of a much longer story.



And we know there is danger in knowing only one part of the story, as shared so well by Chimamanda Adichie in her TED talk,

[The Danger of a Single Story](#)

We are coming to realize that the stuff of history, the stories, the myths we learn are all naturally biased. They are all told from the viewpoint of those who have the power to tell the stories, and we have accepted them as truth.

We now know that it is imperative to hear the stories from the views of all the participants. How would the Wampanoag Nation have told this story? In fact, what

does the holiday of Thanksgiving mean to the indigenous peoples of America? They see it not as a day of gratitude but as a day of mourning, as a time to remember ancestral history, as well as a day to acknowledge and protest the racism and oppression they continue to experience today. It is the other part of the story. This link provides resources from the National Museum of the American Indian. [What Does Thanksgiving Mean to Indigenous People?](#)

Though Thanksgiving has had a varied history over the years, it was declared an official national holiday in 1941. For many years, Thanksgiving was the only holiday that hadn't been co-opted by commercialism and excessive marketing. Unfortunately, though the feast itself remains family-oriented, football and Christmas shopping (Black Friday) have become the focus of the four-day holiday.



celebration, but a daily response.

But the overall *feel* of the feast remains one of gratitude and thankfulness, attitudes that really should not be a once-a-year

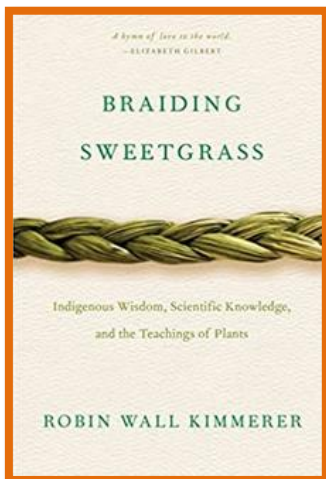
The Haudenosaunee (whom we have known as the Iroquois Confederation) offer us a more expansive way to express gratitude for the blessings we receive daily. They speak of it as ***The Thanksgiving Address***. It is not a prayer, but an address, an invocation of gratitude, to the varied members of creation for the gifts that each brings to the whole.

The Address is also known as ***The Words That Come Before All Else***, as it is traditionally spoken to greet the day, start a meeting, or before starting any kind of negotiations with others. Listen to our native brothers and sisters speak about it and what it means to them.



<https://grateful.org/resource/thanksgiving-address-haudenosaunee/>

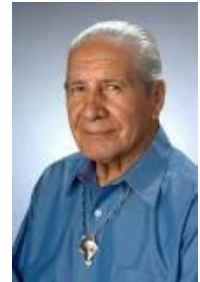
Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book ***Braiding Sweetgrass*** writes that “You can’t listen to the Thanksgiving Address without feeling wealthy. And while expressing gratitude seems innocent enough, it is a revolutionary idea. In a consumer society, contentment is a radical proposition. Recognizing abundance rather than scarcity undermines an economy that thrives by creating unmet desires. Gratitude cultivates an ethic of fullness, but the economy needs emptiness.



The Thanksgiving Address reminds you that you already have everything you need.

Gratitude doesn’t send you out shopping to find satisfaction; it comes as a gift rather than a commodity, subverting the foundation of the whole economy. That’s good medicine for land and people alike.” (p111)

When Kimmerer asked the **Onondaga Faithkeeper Oren Lyons** about sharing the Thanksgiving Address in her book, he said, “Of course you should write about it. It’s supposed to be shared, otherwise how can it work? We’ve been waiting for five hundred years for people to listen. If they’d understood the Thanksgiving then, we wouldn’t be in this mess.” (p116)



Click on this link for a 9-minute reflective video of the Thanksgiving Address:
<https://danceforallpeople.com/haudenosaunee-thanksgiving-address/haudenosaunee-thanksgiving-address-20/>

Click on this link for a PDF version of the Thanksgiving Address:
https://americanindian.si.edu/environment/pdf/01_02_Thanksgiving_Address.pdf

At the end of her book, Kimmerer issues this challenge: “The moral covenant of reciprocity calls us to honor our responsibilities for all we have been given, for all that we have taken. It’s our turn now, long overdue. Let us hold a giveaway for Mother Earth, spread our blankets out for her and pile them high with gifts of our own making. ... Gifts of mind, hands, heart, voice, and vision, all offered up on behalf of the earth. Whatever our gift, we are called to give it and to dance for the renewal of the world. (p384)