

Thanksgiving, 2007

Colossians 1:9-20

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Old First Congregational Church, Bennington

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For purple mountains' majesty
While looking to the east;
For mists that shroud Mt. Anthony,
Then lift, for eyes to feast
Upon the leaves and conifers
That seem just out the door;
For sights of mountains gray and green,
Can we thank God for more?

Oh, yes, we can, for there's no end
To blessings in this place;
Like forebears who to Zion went,
It's here we find God's grace
So we might thank the Lord for all
The things we're blessed to see;
So let us try to name them now —
God's gifts for you and me.

This is Thanksgiving, don't you know?
When first it came to be,
In 1621, that those
Who'd braved calamity
Sat down with folk in foreign lands,
And knew their pastor right,
When just a year before he'd said,
God yet would bring more light!

Now we, their offspring in the faith,
Still called to trust God's grace,
Know that the light ahead will shine
Whene'er we turn our face
To see God's blessings here and now,
In things most everyday;
So let's all turn to things Vermont,
And thanks to God convey.

Let's start with narrow roads we drive;
Our state wastes not the space
To put broad shoulders yards away,
And green'ry to erase!
We try to damage less the earth
Than other places do;
We know the land's not ours to take
But God's, to us renew.

And then in winter when it snows,
The salt we all eschew;
It means you have to drive with care,
And run not trees into;
It means you have to take your time,
And not be in a hurry;
If winter patience you can learn,
Vermont means you won't worry!

Unless, of course, you have a child
Who thinks that driving's fun
In snow and sleet and slushy slides
But then is soon undone
By physics' laws of go and stop,
And friction that's not there;
We pray they learn, so only cars
Will need to be repaired!

What else is good about this place
Where people seem to thrive?
You know what I like? Four-way stops!
When I go for a drive;
Because you have to *think* and then
To neighbors gracious be;
Some places, traffic lights we need,
But 4-ways give me glee!

One thing you know, I like to sing,
In Chor'l Society,
Some music's loud and thrilling, and
Some 'genders piety;
When folks are glad about God's gifts
It's such a gift to sing,
Or maybe smile and listen when
Good news the singers bring.

The meeting of each town each year
In March is quite the thing;
Although sometimes not many come,
Reminders does it bring
That we're responsible for what
We want to pay and do;
And also that majority
Decides – and not the few.

And this is true in churches, too
With roots in our state deep;
It means, at best, that God will speak
When we don't act like sheep,
But pray that God will wisdom give
So we'll act as a team;
This means, at worst, the loudest few
Take worry to extreme.

Now, sweetly, Ben and Jerry's has
A taste I'm grateful for;
How good we're not "the Dead," so
Cherry Garcia we adore!
And where else can your eye be on
The sky with bright Mark Breen,
Or Steve Milesky holding forth
On clouds above unseen?

No billboards blight the landscape in
A rash of loud display;
My freedom to enjoy the view's
More valued than the say
Of those who'd try to sell us stuff
And take our eyes away
From nature and its people, too,
As we go on our way.

I like to get in my green boat
And paddle Sommerset;
Or up to Stratton Pond we hike,
Where, yes, you can get wet,
But that's true anywhere you seek
The peace of mountain air;
I've done it many places, for
Outdoors is oft so fair.

Blue skies that come out after rain
Or snow is such a treat;
And this is true most anywhere
Save where there's too much heat;
I know the snow's a pain for some,
And with them sympathize,
But what a gift, when storms are done,
To revel in blue skies!

Here in Vermont's the old Long Trail,
Precursor to th' A. T.
One other thing folks love to do
Is get up on their skis,
Then down the hill they go! Or some
Will go a-cross country;
And if it's antique cars you like,
V. T.'s the place to be —

At least this special place down south;
Vermont begins right here!
And it began, in 'sixty-two,
When Robinson held dear
The chance to settle in this place,
And make some money, too,
By selling land to friends and kin,
So blessings they'd pursue.

They came up here and built a church
Right there out on the green;
And we can thank our lucky stars
That when the Brits were seen
By good John Stark who pointed west,
And vowed they'd whip the reds,
They won – plus, thanks that Molly Stark
Still lay with John in bed.

“The fighting pastor” they called Jed,
Who first led here our band;
Now, he and consort Betsy Buck
Lie there – or in *this* land;
But neither here nor there’s the point,
For what is plain to see
Is pastor and the people both
Began a ministry.

They healed the wounded in that church,
And there they ran a school,
So youngsters in this town of ours
Would grow up smart, not fools;
'Cause God to us gave brains to use
No matter what our age,
We learn this both within our hearts,
And on the Bible page.

This Bennington then grew and swelled,
Until revival caused
The church to want a brand new home
So fancy, folks might pause
And wonder, ooh and ahh,
Not only at the building there,
But at the beauty of our faith,
Sustained by love and prayer.

With columns planed and pulpit high,
They showed God from above;
But gathered down in boxes here
Still heard incarnate love;
Clear windows letting in the sun,
A lantern all can see
Proclaimed more light might yet break forth
From God to you and me.

What other things about this place
Can we be thankful for?
The Bennington Muse'm below
Has quite a lovely store
Of things antique, historical,
And artsy on display;
From Grandma Moses to our weather-
vane, it's some array!

And if some friends from out of town
Would like a shopping spree,
Then off you go to County Street
To find some pottery!
Then look you up atop the hill
To our famed Monument,
Though lit by day, or moon or lights,
It brings astonishment —

No, not that war's so great a thing;
We wish it never was;
But that the people of this town
And state were thankful 'cause
This battle helped to *end* a war
That might have raged too long;
We wish that leaders everywhere
Would learn of peace the song.

I'm thankful, too, of food this day,
Of turkeys brined and baked;
With dressing, beans with mushroom soup,
My hunger's surely slaked;
But then there's always room for pie,
Perhaps a glass of wine;
And with some fam'ly there to laugh,
That's surely a fine dine.

And yet I know that other folks
These days go out to eat,
Which leaves you time for other things,
Avoiding kitchen heat;
But most important on this day
Is thanks we have to give,
For not just food, but life, and love
That we the more might live.

And speaking now of restaurants,
I'd go to lots again;
Sometimes it's Jensen's that I like,
And others, the Blue Benn;
Pangaea is a special place
If you have lots of cash;
Green Tea or Lucky Dragon
Are two places where I'd dash.

I like the chimes at Corners Four;
And mornings here at eight,
You hear the bell from Sacred Heart
To know if you are late;
And streetlights in Old Bennington
Are really very cool,
Sometimes I get to change the bulbs!
I'll bet that makes you drool!

Another one I'm thankful for
Is Vincent Ravi Booth;
For he was brave to see the old
Could tell the gospel truth
Perhaps much better than the new —
Which had become uncouth;
And so this shrine colonial
Was given back its youth.

And now this place has welcomed in
For more than ten score years
All kinds of people, near and far,
For laughter, peace and tears;
But mostly we are thankful here
For people in these pews,
And even more for faith that we
Are bearers of good news.

It's news that travels far and wide,
And not just in this place;
For God's light shines across the world,
Where'er God's love embraces
All who know they're not the end
Or center of the world,
But we are stardust of God's grace
By gracious love unfurled.

"Vermont's a state I love," said
Calvin Coolidge long ago.
The "loving breast" of 'lasting hills
Set Calvin all aglow;
"Invigorating climate" is
One thing he held as dear;
But most of all the people
Freely serving others here.

The people, yes, we think of them,
That is, each citizen
As free to live, and free to love —
Do you remember when
Vermont was first to say, what counts
Is if you love for life —
And that's true whether you are partner,
Husband, or a wife?

Things change, and we don't always know
The reason or the why;
But what we know's a guiding hand
Anxiety defies —
But cannot win – for God has come
And rescued us from fear;
That though some things may die, it's
Resurrection wipes our tears.

Our God, committed to us all
Calls us to faithful be;
That is, to trust God up ahead
And not look back to see
That only then did things work out,
But God goes on before;
So we'll bear fruit in ev'ry work
And grow in God's strong pow'r.

These Mountains Green – or white – they be,
The tips of icebergs are;
They represent to us much more
Than gifts seen near or far;
For thanks are deep within the heart
And drive our inner being;
The gifts of God go way beyond
The things within our seeing.

Now, people of the Old First Church,
Remember Christ's love strong,
That says in life and e'en in death
To God we all belong;
Give thanks this day and sing aloud
To God within this place;
Since whereso'er we go, we're sure
To see, each day, God's grace!