

### **Thanks for All the Fish!**

Full disclosure: A couple months back, the Worship Associates and I were sitting around a table working through sermon titles and assignments when we saw the Thanksgiving Service coming right at us. Thanksgiving was coming during the month when our congregation would be asking the question, “What does it mean to be a Community of Story.” The Worship Associates and I wondered, what story could we possibly tell about Thanksgiving besides the tired old Puritan-Native American harvest feast story, which is not only largely fiction, but also largely offensive? We all looked blankly at one another for a while, imaginations stumped. Then Doug Sherman piped up and said, “All I can think of is ‘So Long, And Thanks for All the Fish!’” We all started laughing so hard that I wrote it down, and now Thanksgiving is here, like for real, and I have to do something with this title. Thanks Doug – thanks for all the fish.

Just to catch you all up, “Thanks for All the Fish” is a phrase that arises out of Douglas Adam’s *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* series, which is the true story of Arthur Dent, after the world is destroyed by aliens. Let me be perfectly clear, I try to never confuse the truth with facts. The phrase, “Thanks for All the Fish!” in Arthur Dent’s true story is uttered from the ever-grinning mouths of dolphins.

According to *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, dolphins are the second-most intelligent species on the planet Earth, surpassed only by mice. Now, humans

have always assumed that we were more intelligent than dolphins because we had achieved so much – like the wheel, New York, wars, and so on – while all the dolphins have ever done was play and muck about in the water having a good time. Apparently, the dolphins have always believed that they were far more intelligent than we are for precisely the same reasons.

One thing is sure, in the true story of Arthur Dent and the *Hitchhiker's Guide*, the dolphins knew of Earth's destruction long before it ever happened and they tried to tell us about it, but we misinterpreted their messages of warning as "amusing attempts to punch balls and whistle for tidbits of herring."

Another thing about dolphins, according to the *Hitchhiker's Guide*, is that they have developed a rather peculiar ability, which exploits the plural nature the universe. In the picosecond before the world was destroyed, they instantly winked into existence in all other possible probabilities in the "Whole Sort of General Mish Mash" of the cosmos. Stephen Hawking would love this stuff.

In short, when the aliens came, the dolphins split. The last-ever dolphin message to us earthlings, before they escaped our doomed planet for good, was misinterpreted as a surprisingly sophisticated attempt to do a double-backward somersault through a hoop while whistling the *Star Spangled Banner*. This message was, in fact, a dolphin bidding us farewell, "So long, and thanks for all the fish!"

So, there you have it: grateful dolphins before the world is demolished. How to make a Thanksgiving service out of that? Thanks, Doug – thanks for all the fish.

But then I heard another true story. One about the most beautiful fish in the world, who found happiness and community by giving away his beauty and who became grateful that he had given of himself. It was a simple story, no need for the plural nature of the universe or probabilities in the “Whole General Mish Mash” of the cosmos. Just a simple fish tale about building relationships by giving a little, invitation, and play. It was another story that could begin and end with “Thanks for all the Fish!” Thank heavens for all the fish. So, there we have it: the true story of Arthur Dent and the true story of *The Rainbow Fish*.

Now I will tell you a little of my true story, and what I can see of yours, and finally a story of gratitude that we can tell together.

As many of you know, I am a Canadian, a resident alien, actually. So, I have a bit of an outsider’s view of your country’s curious cultural celebration held every fourth Thursday of November. Let me get this right – all family members and friends, too, who may live in separate and distant places around the planet, travel in any way they can at exactly the same time, which results in overcrowding on all routes, so each family and all their friends can meet in a single location, resulting in overcrowding in homes and at dining room tables, to eat an enormous meal,

with little variation in the meal from home to home, followed by sonorous naps, extensive clean up, and this game you call football (though it has strange rules); then everyone travels back to their individual homes around the planet at exactly the same time, which results in overcrowding on all routes once again. Fascinating.

Yet, when I dig deeper into this cultural practice, I am led to understand that *this* holiday called Thanksgiving, and not Christmas – a holiday during which you are given small pieces of green paper, digital watches, shining stuff and glimmering things to increase your belongings thereby your status – this holiday of Thanksgiving, which is about gratitude and family and friends, this holiday of Thanksgiving, and not Christmas, is most people’s favorite holiday. Fascinating.

And what do you do at this peculiar holiday, besides travel too much, eat too much, play games, occasionally get on each other’s nerves, and then travel too much again? You tell dazzling stories, true stories, your stories to one another. And you create new stories. Grandma’s lumpy gravy, Uncle Greg’s endless graces. When Tiffany and Mark announced their engagement. Aunt Sally’s remarkable farts. And dad’s terrible jokes. You tell stories and date them by the ages of babies, or whether the events happened before or after the divorce. You tell stories about those in the room and those passed into blessed memory. You tell the stories together because nobody else understands. You give and receive and are grateful

through these stories. You strengthen the ties that bind and you play together. This is your holiday for Thanksgiving. How wonderful!

We have had some rough days lately. A lot of fear, a lot of grief, a lot of re-lived trauma. It's been hard. And it will continue to be hard. I wonder about the future of civility and civil rights as we know them, let alone where we hoped we could take them. Party politics aside, winners and losers aside, the rhetoric has become so hateful, that it gives permission to hate. It gives permission, I fear, for even more violence.

In these turbulent days, when it feels the center cannot hold and we have lost our focus, I am so grateful for all of you. All of you who share your tears. All of you who share stories to make us laugh out loud (thanks Doug). All of you who invite me to play. All of you who remind me that I am not alone. In these difficult days we need each other. We need to remind each other of the poet's words, that joy can be an act of resistance. I give thanks for this precious day and for all of you. So, thanks for all the fish who give us joy, who invite us to play and remind us, not to fear, because we are not alone. Thanks for the ocean in which they swim, thanks for the shore, the sand, the smooth stones that know more true stories of gratitude than any of us.

Listen, listen to the story the stones tell on the beach, our story:

*Out of the stars in their flight, out of the dust of eternity,*

*here have we come.*

*Stardust and sunlight, mingling through time and through space.*

*Out of the stars have we come up from time,*

*Time out of time, before time, in the vastness of space,*

*Earth spun to orbit the sun.*

*Earth, with the thunder of mountains newborn, the boiling of seas.*

*Earth warmed by sun, lit by sunlight,*

*Created our home.*

*Mystery hidden in mystery, back through all time.*

*Mystery rising from rocks in the storm and the sea.*

*Out of the stars, rising from rocks and the sea,*

*Kindled by sunlight on earth, arose life.*

*Swimming, crawling, walking, flying life.*

*Ponder this thing in your heart, wonder, gratitude,*

*Life up from the sea.*

*Eyes to behold, throats to sing, mates to love.*

*Life from the sea, warmed by sun, washed by rain,*

*Life from within, giving birth, rose to love.*

*This is the wonder of time; this is the marvel of space;*

*this our true story.*

*Out of the stars swung the earth;*

*Life upon earth rose to love.*

*Let us be grateful. This is the marvel of life,*

*Rising to see and to know.*

*Out of your heart, cry wonder.*

*Sing in the thanksgiving that we live.*

### **For Further Study**

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