

# REFLECTION



Fairlawn Avenue  
United Church

Thanksgiving

Sunday,  
October 12, 2025



THANKS BE TO GOD FOR CANADA

Sunday, October 12, 2025

Rev. Dr. Ambury Stuart

First, I would like to thank the Explore Spirituality Committee for inviting me to lead worship at Fairlawn once again. It's always a gift to stand here - with this wonderful choir behind me and this active, committed congregation in front of me.

Today is Thanksgiving Sunday, which occurs around Canada's harvest time. Long ago, when most Canadians depended on good harvests to get them through the impending Canadian winter, Thanksgiving Sunday was the time when we thanked God for providing us with the food that we knew would be essential for our survival. The words for our opening hymn this morning, written in the 19th Century, express our thanks to God for the harvest.

1 Come, ye thankful people, come.  
Raise the song of harvest home;  
All is safely gathered in,  
Ere the winter storm begin.  
God our maker doth provide  
For our wants to be supplied;  
Come to God's own temple, come,  
Raise the song of harvest home.  
Henry Alford (1810-1871)

These words, which are as old as Canada and much older than our United Church, are certainly beautiful and well-loved, but hard for post-modern, urban Canadians to relate to. First of all, most of us live in towns and cities; we go to the grocery store to buy food and while we may complain about increasing prices, we take it for granted that everything we need will be there on the shelves waiting for us. When we remember that some Canadians are going hungry because they can't afford to feed themselves and their families, we blame our politicians who regularly promise to solve such problems for us. Most Canadians no longer look to God to grant us a bountiful harvest.

The second problem with this 19th Century hymn is that it assumes that "God the Maker" precisely controls the weather and the climate. "When all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin" it is because "God the Maker doth provide for our wants to be supplied". On the other hand, if the rains haven't arrived on time or a hail storm has destroyed our crops, this must be seen as punishment from God for our shortcomings. And if you believe that, then climate-change if it exists at all, is caused by God and not by human beings. Listen to what James Inhofe, a famous and influential climate denier from the United States, has to say about this.

*"God is still up there, and He promised to maintain the seasons and that cold and heat would never cease as long as the earth remains."*

*"The arrogance of people to think that we, human beings, would be able to change what He [God] is doing to the climate is to me outrageous."*

*"[Global warming is] the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people."*

Who was James Inhofe you might ask? He was a Republican senator from Oklahoma who was the Chair of the Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works in Donald Trump's first term. Given Inhofe's stature and influence in U.S. politics it was no great surprise that when Donald Trump began his second term as President, the United States immediately withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord.

So our Thanksgiving hymns need to be considered very carefully. What are we really thankful for in our time and place? Over the next three weeks I would like to say something about the appropriate place of Thanksgiving here in urban Canada and now in the 21st Century.

Thanksgiving is a time for us to reflect on the things we are thankful for, and on this particular Thanksgiving in 2025, I am guessing that many more Canadians than usual will be giving thanks that we can still live out our lives here in Canada. Up to now it has been easy to take Canada for granted. Not since the Second World War have Canadians needed to worry about our country's continued existence, and that war ended before most of us were born. Certainly, there are always wars elsewhere in the world but Canadians are blessed to be surrounded by oceans on three sides and, until recently, an enterprising, peaceful America to the south. Our U.S. neighbour was often loud and annoying, but American industry and initiative has developed the most economically successful country in the history of the world. On good days Canadians can be thankful that we enjoy the benefits of British government, French cuisine and American know-how.

But during Thanksgiving, 2025, we are learning that the continued existence of Canada can no longer be taken for granted. The President of the United States is telling us that after over 150 years as a nation, Canada should just give up trying to be an independent country and become the 51st state of the United States. Donald Trump tells us that we need to get over the silly idea of an independent Canada, finally admit that we can't make it on our own and join the great republic to the south. And when Canadians disagreed, the President began breaking our trade agreements and applying economic pressure to force us to become Americans.

Canadians look at what is happening in the United States - school children murdered in their classrooms, immigrants arrested and transported to prisons in foreign countries, increasing disparities between rich and poor, loss of government services and health care - and we are truly thankful to live in Canada. But given the power of the United States we wonder about how much longer Canadians will be able to continue to live in our own country.

Donald Trump is not the first American president to pitch this idea, and he won't be the last. For example, Thomas Jefferson famously said that absorbing the British colonies to the north would be nothing more than a marching exercise for the American troops. Canada would see the Americans coming and would immediately surrender.

That didn't happen. British North America was invaded during the War of 1812 but a coalition of British troops, Canadian volunteers and indigenous warriors pushed the Americans back.

Fifty years after that war ended, the discussions that resulted in Confederation in 1867 began, and Canada began to evolve as the uniquely open, tolerant and forward looking country that we live in today.

In all our previous Thanksgiving weekends, Canadians could easily take our Canadian citizenship for granted. We knew we were lucky to live in one of the best countries in the world but didn't think much about it. Compared with most other countries, Canada was relatively peaceful, safe, and prosperous. No wonder people from all over the world wanted to live here. However, on this Thanksgiving weekend, we are beginning to understand that all of this could now be taken away from us if we became absorbed into the American Republic. Donald Trump has forced both multigenerational Canadians as well as recent arrivals to reflect again on Canada, our home and our native land.

One of the scripture readings for Thanksgiving Sunday this year comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians. We remember that Paul lived during a time when most of Europe had been conquered by Rome, which established the largest empire in the western world up to that time. There was no democracy in Rome's occupied territories, and Roman governors ruled with an iron fist. We know from Jesus' crucifixion that the Roman governor had life and death power over everyone in his domain. Yet even in the shadow of the cross and under the power of an occupying army, Paul calls on the people to rejoice and not to worry. Here is his advice in these trying times:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:4-9)

Certainly, we Canadians live in challenging times, but the challenges we face are nothing compared with what the early church faced in Paul's time. In the next few years Canada may go through a difficult period. Our economy may suffer because of tariffs imposed by the United States, our most significant trading partner. Our unemployment rate may rise; the cost of food and other essentials may go up; the value of the Canadian dollar may fall. Even so, if this is the price we must pay for Canada to remain strong and free, it will be worth it for the generations that come after us. Our parents and grandparents endured much worse - a great depression between two world wars. Next month we will once again remember the sacrifices they made for their children and grandchildren. Perhaps this present crisis is our opportunity to make our contribution to Canada. Our children are not being called to march off to war in far-off lands - at least not yet. Our challenges will occur closer to home.

Whatever crises lie ahead, however heavy our crosses will be to bear, life will be easier if the communities in which we live are strong. Our churches can play an important role, and our faith can sustain us on our individual and collective journeys. Our United Church in particular can support us no matter how difficult the road ahead may be because this United Church of Canada is so... CANADIAN! This will be the subject of next week's sermon, but perhaps I might say a bit about that subject now as I close today's reflection.

About 50 years ago Canadian author John Robert Colombo wrote that there were only two uniquely Canadian institutions in the world - The National Hockey League (NHL) and the United Church of Canada. Now, Colombo made this observation when the National Hockey League had its headquarters in Montreal and was led by a Canadian, Clarence Campbell. Today, the headquarters of the NHL is in New York City and is led by an American. So for Colombo anyway, it would seem that the only uniquely Canadian institution left is the United Church of Canada. We were created in 1925 and are celebrating our Centennial this year. Our church has always existed only in Canada, and despite its decreasing numbers, it remains the largest Protestant denomination in our country. By comparison, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States is the Southern Baptist Convention, whose members voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump in 2016 and again in 2024.

Throughout our 100 years of ministry in Canada, the United Church has quietly (and sometimes not so quietly) developed a version of Christianity that is uniquely Canadian. We differ from the beliefs of the Southern Baptist convention and the laws of the United States in many important respects: for example, our respect for science, including climate change and the value of vaccines. The United Church also respects women's rights, and recognizes the existence of LGBTQ people. I will say more about the United Church of Canada next week.

Today though, on this Thanksgiving Sunday, let us give thanks for Canada. For its response to the realities of the 21st Century, for its respect for all nationalities, races, religions and beliefs. May we continue to bless and be blessed by our Home and Native land.

Amen