

It is Thanksgiving this Thursday and all the family will be assembling at our home for a meal, something we volunteered to do fifteen years ago, and have been stuck with ever since. We have no idea how to escape, short of faking our deaths. We're up to 27 people so far, representing three political parties, and two languages, Spanish and English, which makes for quite a day.

When I was little, we liked Thanksgiving so much we celebrated it twice, once at my parent's house, then two days later at my Aunt Doris's house in Vincennes. My Uncle Pete sold insurance and one year, in the early 70's, had a good year and told my aunt she could buy the new carpet she'd had her eye on. I remember it was this dusty rose color, which was a brave carpet choice for someone with children. Our carpet in Danville was the color of mud, this dark, mottled brown and tan and beige colors that didn't show dirt.

When we arrived at my aunt's house, she made us take our shoes off on the front porch. She was taking no chances. There were two tables set up, a folding table in the kitchen for the kids and a nice dining room table for the adults. The men were watching TV and the women were setting the tables, when my little brother David, wanting to be helpful, picked up a large bowl of raisin sauce off the countertop and headed toward the dining room and the new carpet.

The adults didn't notice, but I did, and sat watching, enthralled, because I knew my little brother was a klutz and I suspected something interesting was about to happen. And sure enough, when he left the kitchen linoleum and crossed the threshold into the dining room, his stocking feet, which had been gliding smoothly across the linoleum, hit that carpet and all forward momentum stopped except for the raisin sauce, which launched into the air in a brown, lumpy arc, onto my aunt's new dusty rose carpet. It happened in slow motion. I remember it even now. My aunt turning at the faint sound of my little brother's stocking feet on the carpet, her mouth forming a perfect, horrified "O," my mother leaping forward to catch the bowl, but just missing it, the raisin sauce skidding across the carpet, the raisins working their way down deep into the knap.

I saw that, then turned and saw my Aunt Doris, transfixed, facing a great decision, having to discern what was more important—the beautiful perfection of her dusty rose carpet or the feelings of my brother, who had collapsed on the carpet in tears, laying in a puddle of raisin sauce, certain death was near. I was so proud of my aunt. She picked up my brother and said, "It's alright. It's just carpet." This was in the days before Scotchgard, when stains lasted for the life of the carpet, but she didn't hesitate. She hugged my brother to her generous Baptist bosom and said, "It's alright. It's just carpet." Everyone began breathing again, we cleaned up the mess, and every year thereafter told the story of David and the raisin sauce until he cried.

Do you remember when you were in the first grade and your teacher, on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, told you the story of the pilgrims, and asked you to take your crayons and draw a picture of what you were most grateful for? Then we grew older and people stopped asking us to draw pictures of what was most important to us. So we got out of practice and started thinking houses and new cars and money were most important, even though any first-grader with a crayon knew better.

When my little brother ruined my aunt's carpet, I think in that moment she returned to first grade and drew a picture in her mind about what she was most grateful for, and the answer, to her great surprise, wasn't carpet, but people. Ever since then, I've considered Thanksgiving Day to be the day we draw pictures in our minds about what is most important to us. I've been drawing lots of pictures this Thanksgiving. A picture of my wife. My mom is recovering nicely from heart bypass surgery. I've drawn a picture of that. We got to be with both of our sons last weekend. Our first grandchild is three weeks away from her debut. What a picture that will be. And after a ten-year journey, the European Space Agency landed a spacecraft on the nucleus of a comet last week, restoring our faith in human intelligence, which had been severely damaged by Kim Kardashian and Honey Boo-Boo.

So much to be grateful for. What are you grateful for? What picture would you draw this morning?

Early in his ministry, Jesus went to the wilderness where the Tempter asked if wanted to draw a picture of food, fame, and power.

Jesus said, “No, thank you.” And drew instead a picture of trust in God, whose love meant more to him than anything else.

What picture would you draw this morning?

That’s really all the Bible is—people drawing pictures about what matters most to them.

Cain drew a picture of greed.

So Abel drew a picture of generosity.

Pharaoh drew a picture of coercion and power.

So Moses drew a picture of freedom.

Israel drew a picture of inequality.

So the prophet Micah drew a picture of justice.

Judas drew a picture of selling out.

So Mary Magdalene drew a picture of faithfulness.

The chief priests drew a picture of cold formality.

So Jesus drew a picture of hospitality.

That’s all the Bible is. People drawing pictures about what matters most.

A shepherd drawing a picture of his lost sheep.

A father drawing a picture of his lost son.

God drawing a picture of a new heaven and new earth, where there will be no sorrow, no tears, no pain.

It is Thanksgiving this Thursday, what picture will you draw?