Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
—Psalm 95:1–2 ESV

The BBC commissioned one of my favorite pieces of music, Ralph Vaughan Williams’ A Song of Thanksgiving, months before May 8, 1945, when the unconditional surrender of Germany to Allied Forces closed WWII’s European Theater and celebrations erupted around the world. A Song of Thanksgiving was created in anticipation of that very day, but before any such victory was sure. In that way, it stands as a model of the deeper kind of Thanksgiving that Christians are called to—a predictive, proclamatory, and predicative gratitude anchored in Christ that echoes Daniel 3:17–18 (ESV): “God … is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace … But [even] if not …,” we will serve Him! Indeed, Vaughan Williams’ work fronts this very image from its opening passages drawn from the apocryphal Song of the Three Young Men—a song purportedly sung by Daniel’s protagonists after having been cast into the eponymous furnace. This is the kind of Thanksgiving to which we Christians are invited: the kind that expresses certainty of God’s goodness even in the face of the unthinkable and amidst the greatest darkness and hopelessness. Christian Thanksgiving is not a simple act of savoring (though it may involve such). It is not only a sense that good has entered our lives that must be honored with our gratitude (though it encompasses such as well). No, it is the assertion that God, through Jesus Christ, is on our side, regardless of the challenges we face—and even death itself! Christian Thanksgiving is a revolutionary act opposing the tyranny of this materialistic universe. It is the interposing of a higher reality into our present until that present rings and shimmers, setting our hearts and lives alight. Our gratitude is for the finished work of Christ working in and through us to make all things new. It is a response to the joy at the center of all reality, and a conduit of that joy into the world through our lives.

We are blessed to have national annual celebrations of Thanksgiving in the US and Canada (and in other nations as well). Such rhythms are important. They point us to higher truths and ways of being than even the ideals of mother-or-
fatherland, dear though such may be in our hearts. May we use such national celebrations well, and may they help us look “to Jesus, the founder and perfeicer of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2, ESV)

**REFLECTION:**

1. What areas of present reality suggest a natural gratitude to God that can be deepened by considering that reality in the light of God’s goodness, and Christ’s salvation? Spend five minutes turning at least one of these over in your heart, savoring it, allowing God to reveal his own nature through it, and asking that its import magnify throughout your day.

2. What areas of present reality represent something of great difficulty? Spent five minutes turning at least one of these over in your heart, asking God’s Spirit to help put it in perspective through the finished work of Christ. Ask God for strength and faith to be his agent in this world; to deliver you from this difficulty; to deliver others from it through his work in you; and to give courage and even joy in the face of this difficulty to hold fast to God even should this difficulty remain.

3. How can you use the climate of gratitude in this season to advance the God’s kingdom through action, speech, prayer, giving, or some other means? Pray that God will use you as we move through this season.

4. Is it time to join, rejoin, or find a church or gathering where you routinely come into the Lord’s presence with Thanksgiving? If you do not already have such a place pray that the Lord will lead you to one.

5. Will you be seeing someone this season who will need more from you than you naturally can give? Pray that the Lord will open your eyes to see that person as he does, that he will help you understand what a good and healthy interaction with that person should look like, and that his Spirit will use this time to bring healing. Find a prayer partner or safe confidant to stand with you through this process.

6. Find a piece of music that expresses gratitude in a way that deepens your own sense of Thanksgiving. Perhaps one you have not heard for a long time. Allow that music to play throughout this season. Alternately, if you enjoy classical music, listen to Raph Vaughan William’s *A Song of Thanksgiving.* Consider the various aspects of Thanksgiving presented in the scriptures and literary quotes of which it is comprised. (It is rarely recorded, but two performances are free on YouTube.)

7. Take time before (or if its too late for that, during) the holiday to slow down. Add a daily to-do to make time to give thanks. Turn the many practices of gratitude-giving that are popular in this season upward to God and resist the temptation to focus only on your own feelings and thoughts, but rather, ask how you might more meaningfully connect to God’s great story through the areas of gratitude in your life.

**PRAYER:**

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, the beauty of this world, the wonder of life, and the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side. We thank you for setting us at tasks that demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments that satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his
Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcome temptation; for his dying, through which he overcame death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom. Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.—“A General Thanksgiving,” page 836 of the *Book of Common Prayer*, 1979.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Walter A. Rogero II has more than 25 years of pastoral experience including time as a hospice chaplain. He has served churches on Martha’s Vineyard, MA; in Arlington, VA; Tulsa, OK; North Florida; and rural Arkansas. He holds ordination with the Assemblies of God, and has served in the Assemblies, the United Methodist Church, an independent church, and most recently, the Disciples of Christ. Walter holds three degrees from Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK: a Doctor of Ministry, a Masters of Divinity, and a Masters of Arts in Missions. Additionally, he holds an undergraduate degree in music education from Stetson University in Deland, FL.

Walter’s doctoral work focused on creating religion and science dialogue in the local congregation. Walter has served as Senior Program Associate in the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion’s Science for Seminaries Program Phase I, and as an advisor for Phase II of this program. He has presented in national conferences on developing meaningful faith and science dialogue. Walter also has professional experience in education, the arts, local government, and business. He is a flute player as well as an avocational composer. He currently resides in
East Palatka, FL, where he consults and works in the Federal Programs department of his home-town school system. Walter is the president of the ASA Affiliation of Ministers, Theologians, and Philosophers (AMTaP).