



For this era marked by such political polarization, one would think the making of Thanksgiving into a national holiday would be one issue our politicians could agree upon. Not so.

Abraham Lincoln formally declared Thanksgiving a national holiday by Proclamation on October 3, 1863. At a time of blood-soaked national conflict, Lincoln issued the directive as a way of trying to connect a people torn apart by war. Lincoln's words still resonate: "I do therefore invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States (emphasis mine), and also those who are at sea and those sojourning in foreign lands to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise."

The date of Lincoln's Proclamation was 74 years to the day after President George Washington's first call for a "Day of National Thanksgiving" on October 3, 1789. With the birth of a new nation through a ratified Constitution earlier that year, Washington pronounced Thursday, November 26, "Be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, is or will be."

Initially, the polarization was between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. Congressman Thomas Tudor from South Carolina winced, "Why should the President direct the people to do what, perhaps, they have no mind to do?"

The battles in Washington, DC over whether to make Thanksgiving a national holiday would go on for decades, with politicians from both parties accusing the other of, essentially, politicizing an American tradition.

To read the angry volleys launched back and forth over the years of debates on the subject, can get downright depressing, until we realize that, as Christians, we don't need a political declaration of a particular day for "thanksgiving and praise"; this is our daily calling.

Happy Thanksgiving!

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