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I'm going to have a lot of extra space at my table this week for Thanksgiving, for Dad and I will be the only family members there. It will be our first Thanksgiving without Mom, and since my children were here a lot this summer for family events, they will be spending time this week with other family and friends for Thanksgiving. Although I've always helped prepare parts of the meal for family gatherings, this will be the first time I prepare everything.

Preparing a Thanksgiving meal for the first time may cause apprehension in some families, as was the case with Helen Hayes, the actress, who prepared her first holiday meal:

It was Thanksgiving Day, and she was cooking her first turkey dinner for her family. Before serving it, she announced to her husband, Charles MacArthur, and their son James: "Now I know this is the first turkey I've ever cooked. If it isn't any good, I don't want anybody to say a word. We'll just get up from the table, without comment, and go out to a restaurant to eat." Then she returned to the kitchen.

When she entered the dining room bearing the turkey, she found her husband and son

seated at the table with their hats and coats on. Obviously, they didn't have much faith in her ability to cook a turkey.¹

Whether eating at home or away, I know others who may also be spending this Thanksgiving in a new way, possibly having a missing person at the table, wondering how the place will feel without that loved one there. Some may even wonder, *How do I create a place at the table for someone who's no longer here?*

The writer of Psalm 132 was also wondering about creating a place—not at a table for Thanksgiving—but creating a place for worship of God. These poetic words, often called a Psalm of Ascent, were often used as worshipers climbed up the hill to worship at the temple. They sang these songs to prepare for worship, to get ready as they approached the temple and entered inside to encounter God.

This particular psalm recalls when King David wanted to build a place of worship, for during his time as king, they had carried around the Ark of the Covenant, a long box-like shape that represented

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God's presence among them. It originated during their nomadic days when they moved around in the desert. To remind them that God traveled with them, they created this covenant box to carry as they traveled, sort of like a portable church. When David became king, he hoped to build a more permanent place of worship, a temple, so the psalm recalls:

³“I won't enter my house,
won't get into my bed.

⁴I won't let my eyes close,
won't let my eyelids sleep,

⁵until I find a place for the LORD,
a dwelling place.

David was willing to give up sleep and the comforts of his home in order to focus on finding a place for God. [Some of you may remember when the sanctuary at Central Christian was built in 1952, this place for God. First Christian celebrates the 50th anniversary next month of their current sanctuary]. Both of our congregations had sanctuaries before our current buildings, for our ancestors continued to envision finding a new place for God as they outgrew the sanctuaries they had.

In addition to a sanctuary, we also recognize that we can find a place for God anywhere we are—at home, at work, at school, on a camping trip, on vacation—for God is everywhere, surrounding us and filling us each and every moment of our lives. God continues to surround us even when we die. God is not limited to this building, to this place of worship, but this space inspires us to recognize God's presence among us. No matter where we are, God always seems to find a place for us, connects to us no matter what is going in our lives.

I came across a website entitled “Five (surprising) Places to Find God.”² The article began by stating that many of us fall into the trap of thinking we can find God only in church, and then it suggested these locations:

1. *Work*: “The relationships you have, the results you achieve, the quality and mindfulness with which you do your work can all be the stuff of holiness.” Those of you still working, have you ever thought of your work as holy, as a place for finding God? Those of you who are retired, how often did

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you view your work as an expression of your faith in God?

2. *In Difficult Relationships*. “It’s easy to love other people when everything’s going well. But when there are hurt feelings, mistrust, or clashing wills, relationships don’t feel very much as though they are of God.” Most of us rejoice when our friendships and marriages go well, but how many of us find a place for God when these relationships begin to crumble apart?
3. *In Our Failings*. When things go well, we find it easy to give thanks to God, especially at Thanksgiving, but it’s often in the struggles that we find ourselves drawing closer to God, for when we fail, we reach out to grasp onto God’s forgiveness, who gives us another chance to begin again.
4. *In Times of Being Alone*. During the pandemic, many of us found ourselves cut

off from friends and family, finding time to be alone. Some may have experienced loneliness, the anxiety of being without anyone, but some drew closer to God, finding more space and a place for God.

5. *In Pleasure*. “Many people seem to think that if something’s fun, it must be at least partially wrong. Yet God gives us the world to live in and enjoy.” Instead of feeling guilty for enjoying something, rejoice that God has built into us the experience of pleasure.

This week, may you find a place for God at your Thanksgiving table, whether it’s crowded with lots of food and many guests, or if it’s set with a basic meal and several empty chairs. No matter what kind of gathering you have around your table, give thanks, for God always finds a place for you.

¹ Hodgkin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition. #949.

² www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/ignatian-spirituality/finding-god-in-all-things/five-surprising-places-to-find-god/