

**Address given by Matthew Barzun
United States Ambassador to the United Kingdom**

Thanksgiving Day, Thursday 28 November, 2013

This is my first Thanksgiving service here, but not my first time at this pulpit.

Last month, I was invited here as part of a walk-through. The wonderful team here at St Paul's had explained who would sit where, what order we'd process - how it would all work.

At the end, the leader of the team walked me up these steps. I looked out at the hundreds and hundreds of tourists - in large groups and small - crisscrossing in all directions. "You should say something," he said.

"Yes, I plan to" I answered, "I look forward to it" wondering if he thought I forgot that I had a speaking role. Then I turned to walk down.

"No...Now," he said. "Say something now. You need to get used to it because your voice takes six seconds to travel back to you."

"Oh, dear" I thought. "What do I say?" I hadn't written anything yet.

"Just start reading," he said. So I did. There was a sheet of paper up here with bible verses on it.

I launched in right at the middle of the page - I don't remember which passage, but it was one of the preachier ones - a list of things one ought not to do.

As my words travelled around the Cathedral, I watched as the visitors first stopped and look around for the source of the sound and then, spotting me, listened to see if these words contained any relevant instructions for them and finally - sensing none - returned to their self-guided tours.

It struck me on the way home afterward - as I thought about what words I did want to say today - that I should start by avoiding everything I'd just done.

Jumping in at the middle... Assuming that listeners already know the context... And telling people what to not do.

I am sure we can all think of times we were on the receiving end of such a sermon or lecture, or, certainly for those of us who are parents, on the giving end of one. It's a good reminder for me as Ambassador - as I talk about transatlantic trade deals and multilateral treaties.

That reminded me of a great quotation from the British writer and Anglican Dorothy Sayers. Her writings helped me on my own faith journey to becoming a Christian and getting baptized seven years ago.

Sayers was frustrated - writing 70 years ago here in London - by what she'd been hearing from vicars on Sundays.

She wrote about an intelligent carpenter sitting in the front pew while the vicar told him, "Don't forget to come to church on Sundays", "Don't drink so much, "Don't, don't, don't."

She said, and I quote, "What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly - but what use is all that if in the very centre of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry?"

She wrote that in the middle of Second World War.

Around the same time - in fact, exactly 70 Thanksgivings ago - another kind of good table was made.

Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and US Ambassador to the UK John Winant were in Cairo for a war planning summit. Roosevelt invited Churchill and Winant and their staff for a traditional dinner.

The president carved the turkey himself and gave the following toast:

"Larger families are usually more closely united than small ones and so this year, with the people of the United Kingdom in our family, we are a large family and more united than before. I propose a toast to unity and may it long continue."

That unity does continue.

I see it every day. You see it every day. And we all see it writ large today - here - with such an iconic British Cathedral hosting such a distinctly American holiday.

And I think Roosevelt's right. I have my extended family here today, including my mother who's celebrating her 70th birthday. And all of us here are part of the larger family of Americans and Brits in London.

So as we give thanks today, let us remember to make good tables in both senses:

First, like Sayers' carpenter, let us do whatever it is we do every day and do it well as a way of giving thanks.

Second, as Roosevelt did, let us expand our community by welcoming others to our table.

As the President says in this year's Proclamation: "When we gather round the table...this Thanksgiving Day, let us forge deeper connections with our loved ones. Let us extend our gratitude and our compassion. And let us lift each other up and recognize, in the oldest spirit of this tradition, that we rise or fall as one Nation, under God."

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone.