

# THIS IS A COPY OF AN ARTICLE IN THE November 2009 Diocesan post

## THANKSGIVING

*Courtesy of the Church of Myanmar Burma*

By The Reverend David A. Petersen

Last week we had two special visitors in Lake Cowichan, and some of us had the good fortune to meet Fr. Daniel from Sittwe Diocese and Peter Stylo Bishop of Hap'pan. They were our guest from Myanmar Burma and were spending several weeks here in the Diocese as part of the exchange program and on October 1st they were our guests.

Some of us spent the whole day together and others got to meet them at dinner. As the day went on, we got to know a little bit about each other. I discovered Daniel was a new priest who did youth ministry at the Diocese of Sittwe. In his work, he walks up to a hundred kilometres in his job. There is no car, bus or bicycle. At times the roads are impassable. At the Diocesan Office where he works there are manual typewriters. There are only two hours of electricity a day by which he can do more complex work.



**The Reverend George Pell, Susan  
& K. Naw Aung at Stamp Falls watching the  
Salmon make their way up the fish ladders.**

One of my many feelings in meeting these two gentlemen was a funny sense of being scrutinized carefully by an outsider's eyes. I had a disturbing, underlying sense of shame about our wealthy culture, the attitudes it holds – especially about God, and our empty churches. Even those who are considered poor by our standards have much more than many people in Myanmar who are considered to be getting by fairly well. And yet, in my mind, the contrast was the fact that these two gentlemen came from thriving churches – where the youth ministry is in the hundreds and where people were so hungry for the word of God that their church services were hours long and people traveled great distances to get to them. Perhaps our culture has become so accustomed to having so much that we have not only lost the sense of thankfulness but have even fallen into the spiritual trap of thinking of ourselves as self-sufficient. We see ourselves as being able to be our own providers, our own suppliers of life's needs and in a way, independent in the world. We do not think of ourselves as relying on the grace and power of God to supply our needs – we can do it all ourselves! This is really a form of idolatry, another form of the Golden Calf. Our two guests brought to mind the words of another 3<sup>rd</sup> World Christian who came to Canada and looked around and at our empty churches and seeming lack of interest in religion (unless it's the bizarre) and said "The trouble is, you don't need God because you have your heaven here on earth."



**K. Naw Aung & Susan at the Maritime Heritage Museum in Port Alberni with a local Pirate**

Well, these are the thoughts I brought into Thanksgiving. I think of how we have lost the art of appreciation – the ability to recognize the blessings that we have. There is a book recently, a best seller by a man called A.J. Jacobs called *The Year of Living Biblically* and it is the story of a man, who is a lapsed Jew, who creates an experiment – he tries to follow as literally as possible the 681 laws of the Bible and one of them is the commandment of being thankful. He learns for the first time about saying grace for a meal – and he has some trouble with

it because he finds that there are so many people to thank – the farmer who planted the vegetables the truckers who brought them to market the old Italian lady who sold him the vegetables and put them in bags for him and the God who made all in the first place. He writes, “The [thanksgiving] prayers are helpful. They remind me that the food didn’t spontaneously generate in my fridge. They make me feel more connected, more grateful and more grounded... and they remind me that I’m lucky to have food at all... they help me get outside my own self-obsessed cranium.” (Pgs. 95-96).

I remember when my daughter was born the first thing she was given was a little yellow toque for her head. It brought home to me that when you really think about it all that we have from the moment we’re born until we die is a gift of one sort or another. Job said it all when he recognized that “I was born with nothing and I will die with nothing.”

Our culture has lost the ability to give thanks and yet at the same time has become preoccupied with getting. Because we no longer look to God as our source we now feel in competition with life to provide for our own means – trying to place our security in things rather than God. We hoard items trying to find both happiness and security in what we have – and yet Jesus in the gospel today is saying to us that we need to place our security in God – rather than in our own efforts to accumulate possession. Jesus points to God as the one in whom we are to place our trust. God as the one who will provide the things that we need – not necessarily the things that we want or think we want but rather the things we need.

God is our Father.

A Father knows what his children needs and it is his good pleasure to provide those things. To put our belief in the care of God is a freeing act for the soul – we realize that God will provide what is necessary and when we do so we free ourselves from worry – and allow ourselves to focus on our relationship with God and being about the kingdom of God.

Sometimes I hear people wonder about the necessity of our Diocese having a relationship with the people of Myanmar. I’ve wondered too in the past. After all, it takes time and money and money is the thing we worry about a lot now. But I want to share with you the insight that has been given to me. I think that tucked among their luggage, our visitors brought with them a reminder that we are blessed more richly than we can

ever imagine and that we really have it all – except our culture has forgotten God and so really has nothing – and they remind us that despite having only two hours of electricity a day and having only manual typewriters in their offices the Church prospers when it trusts in God.