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First Presbyterian Church-Copperas Cove

SECOND READING: Psalm 100

Luke 17:11-19; Ps 100

Nov 20, 2022

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

<sup>2</sup> Serve the LORD with gladness;  
come into his presence with singing.

<sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD is God.  
It is he who made us, and we are his;<sup>[a]</sup>  
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

<sup>4</sup> Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise.  
Give thanks to him; bless his name.

<sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good;  
his steadfast love endures forever  
and his faithfulness to all generations.

This is the word of the Lord. **THANKS BE TO GOD**

FIRST READING: Luke 17:11-19

pg 80 NT

11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13 they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16 He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

This is the word of the Lord. **THANKS BE TO GOD**

### ***“To God be the Glory, Part 3”***

I love Thanksgiving, don't you? Sure. Most people do.

- Thanksgiving, in fact, is NUMBER ONE on the list of the most popular national and religious holidays in the United States. In a survey done by Statista Research in 2021, Thanksgiving had a popularity rating of 81%, followed by Christmas with 77%.<sup>1</sup> Of course, this may have something to do with Thanksgiving being a holiday that all religions celebrate, but still it is a very beloved holiday.
- If asked, I'm sure most people would say they love Thanksgiving because of the food. We love to eat. And we love the tradition of our country's heritage... (I'm sure other country's have theirs), but here eating turkey or ham, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie. Many of us love to cook too, using recipes that we've perfected over the years, maybe ones that our mothers originally gave us, that their mothers gave them.
- And we love it when gathered friends and family begin to gravitate toward the kitchen, and as the meal is being prepared, the conversation and laughter flow... the memories of Thanksgiving holidays gone by inevitably are called up.
- When my sisters are together, nearly always the story of Wendy, my next older sister challenging me to an olive eating competition is told. We didn't get olives too often so the special treat of olives at Thanksgiving was exciting. She, 5 years older than I, was wiser in the challenge, however, and more deceitful too. She'd take an olive. I'd take an olive. I'd eat mine. She slyly put hers under the rim of her plate. The story goes that I ate so many that I became as green as the olives themselves.
- Yes, people love this holiday for many reasons, but maybe it's mostly because it is ultimately a quieter holiday, not so commercialized, when people can with permission, fall asleep in front of the TV after the meal, curl up with a good book, give over real time to the lifting up of truthful and good-hearted conversation with family and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1277607/most-popular-holidays-in-the-united-states/#:~:text=Thanksgiving%20and%20Christmas%20are%20the,by%20Christmas%20with%2077%20percent.>

friends (how needed is that is), openly value the goodness of the fertile earth and  
delight in its bounties,....and

- when we can, as a nation, lift up the importance of the habit and practice of gratitude!<sup>2</sup>

Yes, when we can lift up the importance of the habit and practice of gratitude to God. We've been talking about the importance of gratitude as we've focused on stewardship these last couple of weeks. Gratitude, the giving thanks for all our blessings is at the heart of our faith. It is. It's central in the witness of Holy Scripture.

- The book of psalms, for instance, is just full of poems and hymns of gratitude to the Creator and for the Creator's creation. So many of the psalms almost sound like love letters.<sup>3</sup> They drip with, they exude, praise and adoration. The second reading this morning is an example...*"Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth...Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise."* The psalmist simply looked around and saw all the abundance of blessings...the rich soil with its growing trees, flowers and grasses, the amazing animals—
- soaring birds, swimming fish, and wild beasts, the glorious mountains, valleys, seas, deserts, the sun, moon, the stars....they saw all of it...they saw it as signs of God's goodness and presence with them. They saw themselves in the Creation and in awe, they just could not help themselves. They gave thanks.
- John Calvin, is famous for saying, *"There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice."*<sup>4</sup> And contemporary theologian, Karl Barth, was fond of saying that the basic human response to God is gratitude---not fear and trembling, not guilt and dread, but thanksgiving. *"What else can we say,"* he said, *"...but to stammer praise?"*<sup>5</sup> Yes, the basic human response to God's marvelous grace towards us is gratitude.

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<sup>2</sup>J. Buchanan. *Sermon: "Thanksgiving"* <http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2011/112011.html> (accessed 11/17/2017).

<sup>3</sup>Mark Douglas and Wallace Buhar, *Feasting on the Word*, p.145 Quoted by J. Buchanan in *Sermon: Thanksgiving*.

<sup>4</sup>John Calvin. <http://www.beliefnet.com/quotes/evangelical/j/john-calvin/there-is-not-one-blade-of-grass-there-is-no-color.aspx>. (accessed 11-17-17).

<sup>5</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3 (Edinburgh T&T Clark, 1960), 564.

- Scripture tells us that, “*On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and GAVE THANKS ...*” Jesus modeled for us gratitude in receiving ordinary bread as a gracious gift from his Father. As he had likely done a thousand times, he lifted it and as he did, he lifted up the sun and the water which nourished the wheat’s kernels, the farmers who planted and harvested the crops, the women who pounded the wheat into flour, made the dough, and baked the bread in the ovens, and the animals who carried it in their carts to market. And Jesus gave thanks with a sacred contentedness, a holy joy, even in the face of his imminent crucifixion.
- While the Greek translation of Eucharist is thanksgiving, the root of Eucharist is *charis*, which means grace, and the derivative of *charis* is *chara*, which means JOY!<sup>6</sup> Friends, giving thanks is indeed our basic human response to our gracious God, to what God has revealed to us in Creation and in the life of Christ. It also is our delight, our pleasure and satisfaction. It is our joy.
- In biblical times, leprosy, the term for a variety of skin conditions, was the most dreaded of diseases. It was not only thought to be highly contagious, it was considered punishment for sin. Lepers were often banished to live outside of town, to beg for food from a distance. They were excluded from the synagogue and their family. They were the ultimate social outcasts, feared, rejected, avoided, and condemned until the priest pronounced them clean again.

One day, 10 lepers approached Jesus, calling out, “*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*” Jesus responded, “*Go and see the priest.*” On their way the leprosy disappeared. The priest could now declare them safe for life in community once again. How thrilled they were. One of the ten lepers, only one, returned to thank Jesus. He knew it was God who’d healed him, and he threw himself on the ground before the Lord, overcome with joy and humbled by the divine gift. Jesus responded with “*Your faith has made you well.*” Some translations say that he said, “*Your faith has saved you.*” Regardless, what Jesus

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<sup>6</sup>Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*, 32.

was making known was that this man's healing was not only a medical cure and restoration of his social status, as it was with the other 9, this man was made whole. His life was redirected, made joyous, complete, because it included thankfulness.<sup>7</sup>

Gratitude was at the heart of this man's faith, and it seems that he'd made the giving of thanks a habit. It was his first inclination, wasn't it? (*pause*) So, when we cultivate the habit of gratitude, the joy which comes as a result is deep."<sup>8</sup> It makes us whole and redirects our lives.

- And in addition, if we make a habit of gratitude, we will be thanking God during all times, even the dark times...which surely come to all of us. Like the leper, in our struggles, our dark times, a habit of gratitude will draw us to reach out, without thinking, as a matter of course, to the One who is reaching to us to comfort and strengthen us, the same One who lifted the bread and gave thanks on the night of his arrest. Fredrick Buechner, says this, "*Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.*"
- Certainly, the pilgrims, who started the tradition of Thanksgiving nearly 400 years ago, had the habit of practicing gratitude, even amid hardship. One hundred and two of them settled in Massachusetts but during their first winter, half of them died of scurvy, hunger, disease and cold. Imagine it... "every family lost someone."<sup>9</sup> But yet they took the time to offer God thanksgiving. Their joy was not dependent on their circumstances. They knew they were forever in God's care, and for this they could offer thanks.

Yes, there are many reasons to love Thanksgiving, but the greatest reason is that the habit of gratitude is placed front and center. I will close with a poem by a psalmist of our own time, Kathy Vick.

- *You saw the universe when it was cold, void and bare.*

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<sup>7</sup> Margit Ernt-Habib, "Theological Perspective on Luke 17:11-19" in *Feasting on the Word*, Yr C, Vol 4, eds, David L. Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 166.

<sup>8</sup>J Buchanan.

<sup>9</sup> John Buchanan.

*Did You smile when You hung the sun, in the air?  
Did sweet words of awe escape on Your tongue?  
When you first saw the beauty that You had begun?*

- *Were You like an artist who gets lost in her craft?  
Did You stop in the middle, did mistakes make You laugh?  
Did Your breath, come like waves when You sketched in the moon?  
Were You finished by nightfall, did the moon leave too soon?*

- *God, You gave us our morning, You crafted the night.  
You painted them both with a soft, fragile light.  
I've seen all the colors that You laid in the sky  
Bright ribbons of heaven that make poets sigh.*

- *Tell me, did You know how amazed we would be  
When Your purples and oranges ran into the sea?  
Did you know we might cry when we saw a sunrise?  
You'd revealed who You are in our own artists' eyes.<sup>10</sup>*

- Look around, brothers and sisters. See yourselves in Creation at the hands of our God and give thanks. When it becomes a habit, you will be whole, and your joy will be complete.  
*HAPPY THANKSGIVING. To God be the Glory. Amen.*

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<sup>10</sup> Kathy Vick. *"The Hand that Paints the Sky."* (Green Forest, AK: New Leaf Press; 2003); 43.