



Thanksgiving Eve
WORSHIP SERVICE

Hosted by
St. Paul United Methodist Church
November 26, 2020

Prelude "Time Now to Gather" (Horman)

Welcome

*Call to Worship: (Psalm 100)

Leader: Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

People: Worship the Lord with gladness!

Leader: Come into God's presence with singing!

People: Enter God's gates with thanksgiving!

Leader: Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good!

People: God's steadfast love endures forever!

1. Come, ye thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home;
all is safely gathered in,
ere the winter storms begin.
God our Maker doth provide
for our wants to be supplied;
come to God's own temple, come,
raise the song of harvest home.

2. All the world is God's own field,
fruit as praise to God we yield;
wheat and tares together sown
Are to joy or sorrow grown;
first the blade and then the ear,
then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.

3. For the Lord our God shall come,
and shall take the harvest home;
from the field shall in that day
all offenses purge away,
giving angels charge at last
in the fire the tares to cast;
but the fruitful ears to store
in the garner evermore.

4. Even so, Lord, quickly come,
bring thy final harvest home;
gather thou thy people in,
free from sorrow, free from sin,
there, forever purified,
in thy presence to abide;
come, with all thine angels, come,
Raise the glorious harvest home.

Open Prayer (Deuteronomy 26, John 6) Pastor Shari

Almighty God, you have led us into a land flowing with milk and honey. As we rejoice in your manifold blessings, help us remember those who have no bread to eat. As we celebrate the bounty of your table, remind us to seek the food that does not perish. Help us listen to the words of your Son: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Amen.

Special Music

"Now Thank We All Our God" (arr. Jones)

Community Prayer

Gracious Lord, we thank you for the blessings that you have given us personally, and as a community this past year. We give you thanks for those who have served in the community to protect, provide, and heal us like those who have served in the Fire Department, the Police Department, the hospitals, the New Windsor Food Bank and Blessings Closet, also those who have served as community leaders, our mayor, teachers, and all other community positions. May You bless each and everyone of them, and us as we gather to give you thanks and praise. Lord we ask you to be with those who will be hungry, lonely, suffering, ill, and those who do not know the hope of your Son Jesus. We pray all of these things in His name by saying these words...

The Lord's Prayer

Scripture Readings

Hebrew Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:7-18

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you.

Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and

have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid waste-land with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

Epistle Lesson: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

⁶The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹²for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Gospel Lesson: Luke 17:11-19

Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

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

Response to Scriptures:

Leader: This is the word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God!

Sermon:

Living in Gratitude

Rev. Shari McCourt

So I did a little research to look at the history of Thanksgiving. In North America: Thanksgiving Day was first celebrated on September 8, 1565 in St. Augustine when Pedro Menendez de Aviles and his men shared a feast with the natives. After that Pilgrims held a three days feast to make merriment on their enormous harvest.

In United States: The immigrants who sailed to this country aboard the Mayflower were basically members of the English Separatist Church (a Puritan sect). They took shelter in the Netherlands, but soon were disgusted by their lifestyle. They settled in United States with a desire for a better way of life. This was based primarily on religious freedom.

Let's remember what we were taught in history class about the pilgrim's first year. Their beginning was horrendous! The climate was unfavorable, and many of them died. But in 1621 in the midst of continued trials, there was a huge harvest. They celebrated it with a feast, with 91 Native American Indians who had helped them during their harsh times.

Thanksgiving was celebrated after that, at irregular intervals until Franklin Roosevelt, had set it one week to the next-to-last Thursday of November in order to keep an eye on commercial benefits as Christmas was nearby. Allegations were brought against this decision, which made the President to move Thanksgiving back to its original date two years later, and in 1941, Thanksgiving was finally sanctioned by Congress as a legal holiday, as the fourth Thursday in November.

While at a Bible study a few years ago, many of the members of that group remembered when Thanksgiving was made a national holiday, and the big deal that was made of it in the schools. When going back to the origin of the holiday, it was to celebrate and give thanks to God for bringing the early settlers through difficult times, and providing for them against all odds.

How are we different today?

Most of us have homes, food, medical care, and many others needs and wants. We still have difficult times that test our faith. . .losses, worries and life challenges, and this year COVID-19!

Again, when we look back at the history of this holiday, it was to stop at harvest time, and take stock for all God has done for us. To preserve this holiday as a spiritual practice, aids in our overall good health, and well-being. I want to talk about that a little more in a minute. Preview of up-coming attractions.

As Christian people, we need to seriously look at how we celebrate this holiday in our homes. It is almost entirely lost as a national opportunity to practice gratitude toward God. It has become a sale of all sales! The word "Thanksgiving" is mumbled under the bigger celebration of greed, gluttony, coveting and a fear based theological practice of scarcity in what our culture calls BLACK FRIDAY and CYBER MONDAY shopping.

I remember when I first started noticing this shift, my children were little, and the Tickle Me Elmo doll was the most coveted item. People camped out in front of stores, broke windows, and rioted for a children's toy. Not much has changed, it is just worse. What an example for the children in our lives.

Now the day is about getting together with family to feast, watch football, and go shopping. For many families this is an opportunity for their annual family fight to be picked up again, at Christmas. Our cultural focus has shifted from a healthy National spiritual practice to spiritual deprivation, and self-centeredness.

This brings us to the good news of today's Gospel lesson, the healing of the ten lepers. Jesus was traveling on the boarder of Samaria, and Galilee, when he was approached by 10 lepers. They asked for mercy to be healed, and Jesus, as a good rabbi, sent them back to the priests to be made clean. On the way back to the priests, they were healed. Only one of the lepers recognized the transformation in his life, and the presence of God through Jesus. He realized that he was healed,

and returned to Jesus to praise God for making him whole, healed and restored to good physical and spiritual health. This ex-leaper stopped and took stock in what God had done for him through Jesus saving act.

So what happened to the rest of the leapers? Did they continued with status quo, social norms, perhaps ignored the healing act all together, and continued on with their profession, as beggars bearing witness to spiritual deprivation, and the theology of scarcity. After praising God, Jesus instructed the man, the ex-leaper to get up, and go on his way for his faith had made him well.

The spiritual practice of gratitude has enormous healing power in our personal lives and community. When we practice counting our blessings daily we are remembering who it is, that truly provides for us against all odds. We are thanking the One who reigns over all matters of heaven and earth.

A few years ago I was teaching a Bible study in which we studied a book. It was a Debbie Macomber book titled, "One Simple Act: Discovering the Power of Generosity".

The book focuses on the spiritual practice of gratitude leading us to one simple act after another that comes from the gratitude for all God has done for us. It is laced with simple parable like short stories that are examples of living a faithful, blessed life in the faith of our Lord.

I have permission to share this from one of the members of the group. She said, "Reading and discussing the book One Simple Act has been a challenge. This book so far has made me examine my life and what it means to really be a Christian. While at various times in my life I would have said I was a good Christian, and at other times I would definitely tell you I have not been. Neither of those responses would be what I would tell you today. To be a good Christian is "hard work" and while I have not always succeeded, I definitely keep trying. Over the last 4 years our Bible study group has shown me what one simple act means by their kindness, their generosity, and gratitude they show to others. Often at times, when I don't feel very 'Christian' about something or someone, I try to think what or how someone in our bible study may react to that same issue, and because of what I've seen in the group it has spilled out into me when needed." Her favorite quote from the book is: "We aren't only called to share the gospel we are called to show the gospel, and that to me is a major part of what a good Christian should be."

In the book we are encouraged to write down at least 5 things we are thankful for each day. Each day they should be different things. This practice helps us to go deeper, looking harder at blessings that come from God. This practice helps us to not only have a day of Thanksgiving, but more to the point it puts on the throne of our hearts, Christ as the King. I want to challenge you to try keeping a gratitude journal, and share with me, and with one another how it has effected your life.

Personally, I get very excited when I study research that proofs out the many benefits that come from healthy spiritual practices. The practice of gratitude, we often twist into thinking that it is something that we do for God. It is least we should do, but it is a practice, that benefits us in so many ways.

Andrew B. Newberg and many others have done brain scans and studies that show the positive change in brain chemistry, and function, based on the effects of practicing gratitude. It changes our outlook on life and aids our faith in God and produces measured responses of hopefulness in the lives of those who seek this spiritual practice. The bottom line is, that what we discern, and seek to do in the name of Christ - benefits us physically, and psychologically. This benefits not only the individual, but the community, and all connected to those who practice gratitude.

Thanksgiving is an opportunity as families to praise, and give thanks to Christ who reigns over all, and maybe your heart too. As we give thanks this holiday for our many blessings, it is a time to also be a blessing to others! Amen.

Community Offering - This evening's offering will go the Community Food Bank or you may earmark your gift for Shepherd's Staff Blessings Closet at New Windsor.

Presentation of Gifts

* DOXOLOGY "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow" UMH 95

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise him, all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.

*Offering Prayer

Gracious Loving God, we thank you for meeting all of our needs and so many of our wants. You bless us even when we are undeserving. You keep your covenant with us always, and love us with your grace upon grace. We ask that you bless these gifts, that they may be a blessing to others in your Son Jesus name. Amen.

*Closing Hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth" UMH 92

1. For the beauty of the earth,
for the glory of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies;
Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

2. For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon, and stars of light;
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.

3. For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight;
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.

4. For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild;
Lord, of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.

5. For thy church, that evermore
lifteth holy hands above
offering up on every shore
her pure sacrifice of love;
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.

6. For thyself, best Gift Divine,
to the world so freely given,
for that great, great love of thine,
peace on earth, and joy in heaven:
Lord, of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.

*Benediction

Let us go forth in Gratitude for all the Lord has done through His son, Jesus. Amen.

Postlude

"Give Thanks" (Smith)