

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, people of God, to give thanks and sing!
All: **We come in remembrance of all that God has done for us.**
One: All around us the world shouts of God's goodness, power, and might!
All: **Let us join in the song of praise to God.**

***OPENING HYMN** "Now Thank We All Our God" GtG 643

1. **Now thank we all our God
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things hath done,
in whom this world rejoices;
who, from our mothers' arms,
hath blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.**
2. **O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us in God's grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.**
3. **All praise and thanks to God,
who reigns in highest heaven,
to Father and to Son
and Spirit now be given:**

(continued...)

**the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore,
the God who was, and is,
and shall be evermore.**

Words: Martin Rinkart, ca. 1636; trans. Catherine Winkworth, 1858, alt.
Tune: NUN DANKET ALLE GOTT, Johann Cruger, 1647; harm. Felix
Mendelssohn, 1840
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**God of all grace and glory,
we thank you for all your goodness to us.
Yet we ask your forgiveness for all our not-so-goodness.
Forgive us when we hoard your abundance for ourselves.
Forgive us when we fail to extend your grace to others.
Forgive us when we forget your care for us and
fail to appreciate the height and length and depth and breadth
of your love toward us.
Open our eyes to see you and your grace.
Open our hearts to embrace you and your way.
Open our lives to you and your work in our midst,
that we might reflect the image and embody the love
of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Sisters and brothers,
the news is so good we can scarcely believe it:
God does not hold our sin against us
but pours out abundant grace.
Give thanks to God
and by the Spirit's power
share the gospel far and near:
All: **In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.
All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SCRIPTURE READINGS Psalm 65
Joel 2:23-29, 32
Luke 18:9-14

SERMON “Give ‘n’ Thanks” by Pastor Bill Vincent

PSALM 65 (various)

One: *O God, it is right for us to praise you in Zion
and keep our promises to you,
because you answer prayers.*

**All: *People everywhere will come to you
on account of their sins.***

One: *Our faults defeat us,
but you forgive them.*

**All: *Happy are those whom you choose,
whom you bring to live in your sanctuary.***

One: *We shall be satisfied with the good things of your house,
the blessings of your sacred Temple.*

**All: *By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,
O God of our salvation;***

One: *you are the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas.*

**All: *By your strength you established the mountains;
you are girded with might.***

One: *You silence the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples.*

All: *Those who live at earth’s farthest bounds are awed by your signs;*

One: *you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.*

**All: *You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.***

One: *The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.*

**All: *You drench its furrows
and level its ridges;***

One: *you soften it with showers
and bless its crops.*

**All: *You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.***

One: *The grasslands of the desert overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.*

All: *The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;
they shout for joy and sing.*

We hear in this psalm a song of gratitude: thanksgiving for the harvest and the goodness of God's creation in providing for the harvest and, therefore, providing for the people and their need.

We can identify, with seeing the fields around us, in tending the gardens in our own backyards.

Now, some tend to be further removed from the earth than even we maybe.

Ask some children, "Where do eggs come from?" and you may get the response, "The refrigerator," or, "The grocery store."

But whether directly ourselves or indirectly through others, we reap the harvest of the fruit of the earth – the crops of the field, the resources of the earth – for food on our tables, for the warmth and shelter of a roof over our heads, for the clothes on our backs.

The earth gives forth in glorious abundance, and we are sustained by the bounteous goodness of the earth.

And because of that – when we see and recognize that blessing – we are moved in our hearts to give thanks.

And to give, out of thanks: to share from the abundance we know so that others may see and come to know the same abundance, and join us in a song of thanks and praise...

...even in the midst of calamity.

JOEL 2:23-29, 32 (various)

One: *People of Zion,
celebrate in honor of the Lord your God,
who is generous and has sent
the autumn and spring rains in the proper seasons.*

All: *Grain will cover your threshing places;
jars will overflow with wine and olive oil.*

One: *I, the Lord your God,
will make up for the losses caused by those swarms
and swarms of locusts.
It was I who sent them against you.*

All: *My people, you will eat until you are satisfied.
Then you will praise me
for the wonderful things I have done.*

One: *Never again will you be put to shame.
Israel, you will know that I stand at your side.*

All: *I am the Lord your God -- there are no other gods.
Never again will you be put to shame.*

One: *Later, I will give my Spirit to everyone.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.*

All: *Your old men will have dreams,
and your young men will see visions.*

One: *In those days I will even give
my Spirit to my servants, both men and women.*

All: *Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

These words from the prophet were shared in response to the devastation of locusts the people had experienced: overwhelming swarms eating up the crops, devouring the fields, and the harvest.

Even so God saw them through. God delivered them, saved them. And even blessed them on the other side, with the gift of the Spirit – God's presence – and blessings (once again) of the fruit of the harvest.

Can we identify? Maybe not regarding swarms of locusts, but swarms of storms, and waves of violence, and winds of uncertainty.

How has God seen us through?

How has God delivered us?

How has God sustained us and seen us through difficult times, even when we saw no way through ourselves?

I'm sure it's sometimes difficult to see. But I'm also sure we all have stories we could share.

And I believe that it is in times when we are hard pressed – whether by locusts eating the harvest or tornado winds blowing away our homes or flood waters washing away life as we know it or the visitation of death upon those we know and love – in times when we are hard pressed, it is in remembering how God has helped us and seen us through before – that remembering can uplift our spirits and encourage us and strengthen our faith: our belief that indeed, somehow, God will see us through now, even as God has before.

So that, even in the midst of calamity, we can arrive at a point of giving thanks – expressing immense gratitude, even relief – for God's presence and sustaining power.

And not only giving thanks, but also giving out of thanks: to share the relief we have known, the encouragement we have received; to share the faith, to share the story, to share the resources. For if God has seen me through, God can see you through, too, so that together we can "*call on the name of the Lord*"...

...like someone else did.

LUKE 18:9-14 (various)

One: *Jesus told a parable. He told this parable to people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else. And this is what he said:*

“Two men went into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood over by himself and prayed,

All: *‘God, I thank you that I am not greedy, dishonest, and unfaithful in marriage like other people. And I am really glad that I am not like that tax collector over there. I go without eating for two days a week, and I give you one tenth of all I earn.’*

One: *“The tax collector stood off at a distance and did not think he was good enough even to look up toward heaven. He was so sorry for what he had done that he pounded his chest and prayed,*

All: *‘God, have pity on me! I am such a sinner.’*

One: *“I tell you,” said Jesus, “the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, was in the right with God when he went home. For if you make yourself great you will be humbled. But if you humble yourself, you will be honored.”*

First off, let’s be clear: the first hearers of this parable would have automatically thought of the Pharisee as the good guy; that’s how he was seen in the community. (We, unfortunately, tend to associate Pharisees with hypocrisy. But not so the original audience.) He would have been seen as an upright citizen, a person of good morals, a faithful person whose heart was in the right place, wanting to serve God.

When it came to the tax collector – the much-despised tax collector, who was seen as working with the enemy (the Roman occupation forces) and only out for himself, cheating others by charging more than they really owed – the original audience would have thought he deserved to feel badly about himself; he was right to *“think he was [not] good enough even to look up toward heaven”*... for he wasn’t good enough!

So imagine the shock when Jesus said the tax collector – the traitor and the cheat – that he was the one who ended up *“in the right with God.”* “Come again?” What a reversal! turning the world upside-down! Like the great being humbled and the humble being honored.

Yet that is precisely the grace – the gracious touch and way – of God toward us. It is the ultimate of gifts and blessings: that we do not get what we deserve.

For we all, like it or not, are like the tax collector: *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23) We may want to be self-reliant like the Pharisee suggested when he listed all those good things that he did, and those bad things he avoided – we may even be able to do that, too. But when it comes to being *“in the right with God,”* we’re at a loss, we have not got a chance...not on our own.

So instead of parading our supposed virtues, we should be imploring the mercy of God. We need to rely upon nothing but the grace of God – the “amazing grace” of God:

-that wonder, in that *“while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8)

-that grace, that in Christ, God has embraced us...in spite of ourselves

-that blessing, that God says to us, “I still want to be in relationship with you, I still love you, I still claim you as my own.”

It is the most important reason to give thanks: heart-felt thanks; deep and abiding thanks; awe-struck thanks.

A give-of-my-all thanks. For without this gift, my all is nothing.
-a thanks that God hears our prayers: our “*calling on the name of the Lord.*”
-a thanks that God embraces us in spite of our turning from and rejecting God so often.
-a thanks that God – from a greater danger than a plague of locusts – delivers us and redeems us, restores us and claims us as God’s own.
And we give thanks.

And it seems important to point out that we know of that grace – we know of that “amazing grace” – because somebody, somewhere along the way, told us, and shared the story with us.

Someone we had always known, or only just met.
In-person, or through the pages in a book or on the computer screen.
People whose names we remember and those whose names we can never get straight.

And we give thanks for the stories they told and saved and passed on to us.
Give thanks for their example – for not only telling the story but also living the story, being the story, embodying the story, and standing up for the story of God's grace and love.
For, as we remember that blessing, their example inspires us, their stories encourage us, their witness blesses us.

And we give thanks.
And we give, out of thanks.
Give of ourselves to embrace the story of God's grace and love, that others may see it and hear it in us.
Give of our life and our livelihood, that God's word might be proclaimed and God's justice pursued and God's mercy embodied in us.

So, for what are we thankful to God?
How will we give thanks?
And in our giving thanks, how will we give?

***HYMN** “For the Fruit of All Creation” GtG 36

**1. For the fruit of all creation,
thanks be to God.
For the gifts to every nation,
thanks be to God.
For the plowing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safekeeping,
thanks be to God.**

(continued...)

**2. In the just reward of labor,
God's will be done.
In the help we give our neighbor,
God's will be done.
In our worldwide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing,
God's will be done.**

**3. For the harvests of the Spirit,
thanks be to God.
For the good we all inherit,
thanks be to God.
For the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us,
most of all that love has found us,
thanks be to God.**

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Tune: AR HYD Y NOS, Welsh melody, ca. 1784. *Public Domain*

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Lord, in your mercy...
All: ...hear our prayer.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Contemporary)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**For food and water,
for all the blessings of the land,
for family and friends who enrich our lives,
our hearts overflow with thanksgiving to you, O God.
We have been sheltered and educated and empowered by your generosity.
In Jesus Christ,
we have been shown a way to the wholeness you intend for us.
Receive our offerings as a joyous expression of our gratitude.
Use them, and use us, to further your work in Christ's name. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "God, Your Blessings Overflow" [Tune 14]

- 1. God, your blessings overflow!
What can we begin to say?
How can we begin to show
All our gratitude this day?
God, we join to worship you,
Giving thanks for all you do.**

(continued...)

2. **Thank you for the life you give,
For each friend and family,
For the land in which we live,
For your love that sets us free.
Thank you, God, for daily bread,
And for feasts of joy you spread.**
4. **So we join in thanks this day,
And your gifts we freely share,
So we follow Christ the Way,
Loving, serving everywhere.
Spirit, may our lives express
All our daily thankfulness.**

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Tune: DIX, Conrad Kocher, 1838; abr. William Henry Monk,
1861; harm. *The English Hymnal*, 1906. Public Domain*

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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