



South Cayuga Community Church

of The United Church of Canada

Pastor Dawn Ballantyne, DLM

VAMs: Joan Willis, Rev. Bryan Melick

Pianist: Joan Melick, Pastor Dawn

Music Leader:

Sunday, Oct 8, 2023

Thanksgiving Sunday

Gathering Song

Lord, Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary

MV 18

Welcome

Territory Acknowledgement

This Thanksgiving, we acknowledge that this sacred space upon which we are gathered is land long stewarded by the Haudenosaunee people. May we respect, restore and regenerate the earth, water, and ecosystem of this area, in honour of those who lived here long before us; as we work towards reconciliation with all of God's creation.

Lighting of the Christ candle

May the light of this candle, remind us of the Holy Spirit not only before us, but behind us, beside us and within us. A flame of courage and bravery that pushes us to be bold disciples of the one who said, "I am the light of the world."

We light a smaller candle as well, as a reminder that we must reflect the light of Jesus, wherever we go, that we must hold up the light against hate and fear.

Call to Worship

"We give thanks for the presence of God"

In the songs of birds and the warmth of sunshine,

We give thanks for the presence of God.

In fields of grain, growing gardens, and flowers blooming,

We give thanks for the presence of God.

In the wave of a neighbour and the phone call of a friend,

We give thanks for the presence of God.

In the bustle of the day and the quiet of the evening,

We give thanks for the presence of God.

In the work we do and the games we play,

We give thanks for the presence of God.

In the lessons we've learned and the opportunities to come,

We give thanks for the presence of God.

In the memories we hold and the love we have known,

We give thanks for the presence of God.

Come, let us worship in the presence of God.

Wetaskiwin Writers, Grace Lutheran Church and First U.C., Wetaskiwin, Alta.

The Gathering, Pentecost 2 2023 (Year A)

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Adapted by Dawn Ballantyne

Opening Prayer

Creator of all, you fill us with good things:

Joy, peace, grace, hope, and love.

In this harvest season, we revel in the things of fall:

Crops coming in, colours changing, the land getting ready for rest.

You pour contentment into your people, and also an ache.

We have an emptiness for your kin-dom come on earth as it is in heaven.

In this season of plenty, give us hunger, we pray:

Hunger for right relations,

Hunger for a community of love,

Hunger for a world of justice.

Holy One, receive our prayers.

Amen.

Robin Wardlaw, Toronto, Ont.
The Gathering, Pentecost 2 2023 (Year A)
Used with permission.

Opening Hymn

Come, You Thankful People Come

VU 516

Theme Time

I wonder what your first words were?

Mama, dada, NO, milk...

According to the internet – the most commonly used words are:

Time, year, people, way, day, man, thing, woman

Two very important words – very powerful – influential, potentially life altering, affecting our spiritual and physical health... basically the words of today, or this weekend's holiday is based upon – THANK YOU.

Last Sunday we said welcome in a bunch of different languages – can anyone say thank you in another language?

Merci – French

Gracias – Spanish

Thank you – ASL - take your dominant hand to your chin and move it slightly down and towards the person you are talking to

What's another way to say thank you?

Thanks, TY or THX... sending flowers, note or card... wave (when someone lets you merge); nod or wink... at a concert (applause) or a poetry reading (snap)?

"Gratitude Game"

Children's Hymn

Good to Give Thanks

~ Joyful Strings

Scripture

Psalm 65 (NIV)

Praise awaits^[b] you, our God, in Zion;
to you our vows will be fulfilled.

² You who answer prayer,
to you all people will come.

³ When we were overwhelmed by sins,
you forgave^[c] our transgressions.

⁴ Blessed are those you choose
and bring near to live in your courts!

We are filled with the good things of your house,
of your holy temple.

⁵ You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,
God our Savior,
the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas,

⁶ who formed the mountains by your power,
having armed yourself with strength,

⁷ who stilled the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
and the turmoil of the nations.

⁸ The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;
where morning dawns, where evening fades,
you call forth songs of joy.

⁹ You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.

The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.^[d]

¹⁰ You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.

¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.

¹² The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.

¹³ The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;
they shout for joy and sing.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (MSG)

⁶⁻⁷ Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.

⁸⁻¹¹ God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it,

He throws caution to the winds,
giving to the needy in reckless abandon.
His right-living, right-giving ways
never run out, never wear out.

This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

¹²⁻¹⁵ Carrying out this social relief work involves far more than helping meet the bare needs of poor Christians. It also produces abundant and bountiful thanksgivings to God. This relief offering is a prod to live at your very best, showing your gratitude to God by being openly obedient to the plain meaning of the Message of Christ. You show your gratitude through your generous offerings to your needy brothers and sisters, and really toward everyone. Meanwhile, moved by the extravagance of God in your lives, they'll respond by praying for you in passionate intercession for whatever you need. Thank God for this gift, his gift. No language can praise it enough!

May God help us to apply these words to our lives.

Reflection

We can learn to say thank you in different languages. We can show our gratitude in different ways. But what about when we can't? When we can't fathom being gracious and gratitude filled because we're overwhelmed with feelings of the opposite?

Because if I hold up this mirror and we have a look at ourselves alongside each other having a look at themselves and also looking at others... it feels both awkward and disarming. We can see only what is on the outside – the above ground bark of the trees and we can't see what is happening below the surface. So not only do we express our faith in different ways – we also say thank you in different ways and we also feel grateful for different things and overwhelmed by different things.

Rev. David Guiliano writes this about "Rain on Thanksgiving."

"It's hard to feel thankful sometimes," says Amelia. Over coffee, she tells me about a Thanksgiving Sunday a decade ago. The minister had enthused about all the blessings for which we ought to give God thanks, counting them off on his fingers – food, homes, families, health, clean water to drink, freedom. Then he asked rhetorically, "How could we not be filled with gratitude to God?" Amelia stood and walked out of the sanctuary. She hasn't been in a church since, nor has she prayed.

Her two-year-old, Sarah, had died the previous month. "All I could think," she told me, "was if God gives us all those good things, then why take Sarah? I was supposed to feel thankful? What

about people who don't *have* food or a place to live? Why doesn't God 'bless' them?" Amelia places air quotes around the word bless.

Meister Eckhart, the 14th century German theologian and mystic said, "If the only prayer you said was thank you, that would be enough." [BUT] Sometimes saying thank you feels like too much.

Suffering – our own or others – can make it hard to feel grateful. God's grace can feel [fickle, changeable, unstable] capricious. The mostly unexamined logic of God who "blesses" us, is that it can also mock our woundedness and the injustices of the world. Gathering around the roasted turkey and giving thanks to that sort of God leaves me feeling a bit uneasy.

Like the dis-ease I feel when we sing thanks, "for food in a world where many walk in hunger...for friends in a world where many walk alone." Am I thanking God for being blessed in ways so many are not?...

[Thanksgiving, this] harvest festival can become an unintended rationalization for the belief that God – rather than the [unpredictability] of a genetic toss of the dice, a privileged home life, or a head-start on the un-level playing field of capitalism – is the cause of our individual good fortune. At Thanksgiving, I experience an irreconcilable mixture of genuine gratitude and sadness.

Theologians and philosophers far wiser than me have wrestled with the unpredictable nature of God's blessing. I find no satisfactory theological twist in their conclusions with which to comfort Amelia or to account for the brutal injustices of this world."...

Which brings me back to the Gospel lesson for today – I'm going to read it to you from the First Nations Version – Luke 17:11-19.

I wonder if the other nine couldn't come and say thank you. If they were too bitter and angry that they had suffered so long prior to being healed? Or perhaps they had suffered the loss of a spouse or child or were overwhelmed with the injustices surrounding them that they just couldn't find gratefulness for their own healing when so many others were suffering? Or whether they were afraid to show their emotions in front of the crowd? Or maybe they felt that simply saying thank you was too insignificant and they had run home to get money or jewels or a fatted calf to offer in thanksgiving....?

Jesus points out that the other nine men didn't come back to say thank you, to make a point about the one man, the man from Samaria, a man who would have been outcast and looked down upon doubly for being from out of town and having a skin condition – but he doesn't condemn the other nine men.

Jesus doesn't hunt them down and reverse the healing or denounce them for failing to say thank you. God doesn't tell the grateful man that he loves him more than those who seemingly forgot to say thank you. And we shouldn't judge those other guys for not saying thank you either. We've all forgotten from time to time. We've all struggled to genuinely feel grateful when overwhelmed by chaos. When employment is scarce, when families wonder where the next month's rent will come from, when the news fill us with worry and anxiety about the future, how can we fill our hearts with thankfulness, with praise, with gratitude? How do we give thanks when we see so many reasons to not give thanks?

Well, Brene Brown writes in in her book, Atlas of the Heart, that "there is overwhelming evidence that gratitude is good for us physically, emotionally, and mentally. There's research that shows that gratitude is correlated with better sleep, increased creativity, decreased entitlement, decreased hostility and aggression, increased decision-making skills, decreased blood pressure – the list goes on." (1)

According to Robert Emmons, professor of psychology at the University of California, "Gratitude allows us to participate more in life. We notice the positives more, and that magnifies the

pleasures we get from life...we celebrate goodness... we become greater participants in our lives as opposed to spectators." (2)

There's no denying that gratitude, thankfulness is good for us – but the fact is, sometimes it's just really, really darn hard to say thank you. And that's okay. Because Jesus loves us anyway. That's not permission to be ungrateful – but it is permission to stop beating yourself up. To let go of trying to morph and meld yourself into being thankful today because its thanksgiving and you should have lots to be thankful for.

So if you just can't get there today – and also if you can – these words are for you from John O'Donohue, "The Eyes of Jesus"

I imagine the eyes of Jesus

Were harvest brown,

The light of their gazing

Suffused with the season:

The shadow of winter,

The mind of spring,

The blues of summer,

And amber of harvest.

A gaze that is perfect sister

To the kindness that dwells

In his beautiful hands

The eyes of Jesus gaze on us,

Stirring in the heart's clay

The confidence of seasons

That never lose their way to harvest.

This gaze knows the signature

Of our heartbeat, the first glimmer

From the dawn that dreamed our minds,

The crevices where thoughts grow

Long before the longing in the bone

Sends them toward the mind's eye,

The artistry of the emptiness

That knows to slow the hunger

Of outside things until they weave
Into the twilight side of the heart,

A gaze full of all that is still future
Looking out for us to glimpse
The jeweled light in winter stone,

Quickening the eyes that look at us
To see through to where words
Are blind to say what we would love,

Forever falling softly on our faces,
His gaze plies the soul with light,
Laying down a luminous layer

Beneath our brief and brittle days
Until the appointed dawn comes
Assured and harvest deft

To unravel the last black knot
And we are back home in the house
That we have never left. (3)

We are never far, never without, never void of the love of our Creator – whether we're feeling it or not, Jesus is there with outstretched hand, with compassionate and understanding eyes, with unconditional love to envelope us and hold us close until such time as we are ready to say, thank you.

Brown, Brene. Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience. New York: Random House, 2021. p.211.
Brown, Brene. Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience. New York: Random House, 2021. p.213.
O'Donohue, John. To Bless the Space Between Us. New York: Crown Publishing, 2008. p.219-220.

Anthem

~Joyful Noise

Prayers of the People

On this Thanksgiving Sunday, we name and recognize the many gifts that are so generously given for the work and purpose of our community of faith. Hopefully, you will recognize yourself as both a receiver and a giver of many of these gifts. Today we celebrate all the gifts cheerfully given and the gifts we humbly receive. Let us pray:

We are grateful for the gifts of music, prayers, preaching, reading, and teaching.

We offer gratitude for the gifts of caring, visiting, phoning, and reaching out to others.

We are grateful for the knitters, quilters, fixers, painters, light bulb changers, bakers, coffee makers, and gardeners.

We offer gratitude for those who give technical support and manage the sound system.

We think of the gifts of art, the decorators, photographers, those who draw and make things with their hands.

We are grateful for those who offer gifts of leadership, those who offer their collective wisdom in decision-making on official board, in committees, and in groups.

We remember those who spend time engaging with the youth and the children, with older adults, and with all those in between.

We offer gratitude for those who offer yoga, fitness, nature walks, fellowship and discussions.

Holy God, we are so grateful for the abundance of gifts you have bestowed upon us and we pray now for those whom we are grateful for, who are in need of you today...

Gracious God, you have called us into discipleship, discipleship that requires action, that requires us to care for our neighbours and this world. May we continue to answer that call as we offer our gifts of time, talent, spiritual gifts and these words that Jesus taught us to say together,

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

forever and ever. Amen.

Announcements

CLOSING PRAYER

Great Creator, we give thanks to you for the opportunity to gather as a church family here this morning to offer praise and thanksgiving and wonder to you with grateful hearts overflowing with abundance. We offer thanks for the generous gifts of financial resources that make it possible for us to answer your call and to sustain this beautiful, warm building that we call our church home. We give thanks for the money and cheques in the offering plate and the donations given through PAR and online. Remembering that you love a cheerful giver, may we be faithful, joyful stewards of all we are given. Amen.

Closing Hymn

For the Fruit of All Creation

VU 227

Blessing & Sending Forth

In the midst of God's ordinary miracles, we go forth today to celebrate wonder!

Through Jesus, God calls us out to new places, to new hopes, to new lives!

Through the Spirit, God sends us out with hearts open to the divine presence, ready to share God's love.

May God bless our moments of rest and our times of work.

May God bless our journey, today and always! Amen.

Go Now In Peace

Go Now In Peace

Go now in PEACE, never be afraid
God will go with you each hour of ev'ry day,
Go now in FAITH, steadfast, strong and true,
Know God will guide you in all you do.
Go now in LOVE, and show you believe,
Reach out to others so all the world can see.
God will be there, watching from above.
Go now in PEACE, in FAITH, and in LOVE
Amen Amen Amen

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