

St. John's United Church Service: October 12th Thanksgiving Sunday

Prelude

Acknowledging the Land

As we commence our worship today, we deeply acknowledge the rich history, spirituality, culture, and stewardship of the land of the Indigenous People of this region, the Mississauga-Ojibwe territory of the Chippewa Indigenous people. We are committed to living in respect, peace, and right relations as we live, work, and worship upon this Traditional Territory. We are mindful of past broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations.

Lighting the Christ Candle

We light this candle, acknowledging the presence of Christ with us in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.

Welcome, Announcements & Sharing the Peace of Christ

Musical Reflection TLUS # 1 Simply to BE

Call to Worship

The leaves are changing colour as the fall season unfolds.

We gather to give thanks to God.

The harvest is in. Some tables are full, yet some are empty.

We bring our yearnings for a just sharing to God.

The community gathers to worship, to celebrate, and to give thanks to our Creator.

We give thanks to God for this community of faith.

Let us worship together.

- Catherine Tovell, Kilworth U.C., London, Ont.

Opening Prayer

God, Our Creator, you have given us so much.

Thanksgiving fills our hearts as we return to worship.

God, Our Foundation, you have supported us so well.

A sense of blessing is ours as we take our place in the faith community.

God the Challenger, you are ahead of us as we consider the coming months.

We will not shrink from the path of truth and justice.

God the Eternal One, you know our joys, our fears, and our uncertainties.

In the good days and the days of anxiety, we will trust you, our loving God. Amen.

- *David Sparks, Summerland, B.C.*

** Opening Hymn VU # 516 Come, You Thankful People Come

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Sung prayer response: VU 236 first line only

Cantor: Now thank we all our God.

Refrain : With heart, and hands, and voices.

Merciful Healer, you transform us through the cycle of the seasons.

Guide us when perplexed by the unearthing of tragic histories and shocking news.

Counsellor of reconciliation, enable us to notice troubles of our own making:

Prejudice, arrogance, abuse of power, aggression, pollution.

Help us to declare truths with sincere apologies and begin the healing today toward your justice of merciful love.

We seek to live peacefully, caring for each other and for your creation, as you have blessed us, God of Compassion.

Cantor: Now thank we all our God.

Refrain: With heart, and hands, and voices.

We praise you, O Creator, as the harvest yields abundance and birds fly south in V-formations across the sky.

Great Provider, you have given us more than enough grain to share and planes to transport life-sustaining nourishment across the distance of many nations.

Help us share the abundance of our nation in our own country and through agencies that spread it around the world.

May all who are hungry be fed and your blessings and countless gifts of love shared.

Cantor: Now thank we all our God.

Refrain: With heart and hands and voices.

Help us confront troubles with your insights, O God.

Grant your wisdom to leaders who care for health care, Indigenous rights,

housing for the unhoused, and economic relief.

Give an understanding of the importance of health measures and procedures.

We request that your presence be known by those who feel isolated at home, in hospitals, in long-term-care facilities, in shelters, in prison, or on the streets.

May your loving comfort be known where it is needed.

Cantor: Now thank we all our God.

Refrain: With heart and hands and voices.

God of our tomorrows, receive our own silent prayers, our specific concerns for the world, the needs in our local community, the names of people we know who require your care, and the inner thoughts and pain in our hearts.

(a time for personal prayers)

May those whom we miss holding in our arms be held in your heavenly embrace.

May all who are grieving be held in your tender care.

We know the gospel testimony that Jesus Christ, our Saviour, is with us today and all our tomorrows. God our Redeemer, reassure us that you know everything we need, for we do indeed need your comforting reassurance.

Cantor: Now thank we all our God.

Refrain: With heart and hands and voices.

God, the Spirit who energizes inert matter, awakens us from apathy.

Entrust us, Holy Spirit, with a purpose and lift us to action with your wings of hope.

Guide us to the fullness of life, which includes moments of unexpected inspiration and courage, experiences of truth and goodness, blessings of seeds and harvest, communities living in harmony with you, O God, Living Presence, unseen and yet known by faith,

we will show our thankfulness by being like the birds of the air and flowers of the field, spreading songs of faith and seeds of love, celebrating the diversity of your gifts and talents that have been given us.

- *Ruthanne McLagan, Calvary U.C., London, Ont.*

Singing the Lord's Prayer VU # 960

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:7-18 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

7 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, 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey, 9 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. 10 You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. 11 "Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes that I am commanding you today. 12 When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them 13 and when your herds and flocks have multiplied and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, 14 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, 15 who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous[a] snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock. 16 He 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. 17 Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.' 18 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.

This is the Word of God.

Thanks be to God.

Solo Bless this House

Reflection

Every Sunday, every day, every morning, and every moment, we give thanks to God, the giver of life, the source of love, and the ground of all beings.

This Sunday, however, we designate as Thanksgiving Sunday once a year to celebrate the bounty of the year's harvest. On behalf of St. John's congregation, I thank the Decoration Committee for making this sanctuary special today.

This morning, I want to highlight four of the many thanksgivings, both visible and invisible, from God. Why four (4)? Do you remember my message last Sunday - the four legs of the table?

In numerology, the number 3 represents heaven. So, we believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The number 4 represents the physical body and the material earth.

There are four seasons: spring, summer, fall, and winter.

Four elements of the earth: air, earth, fire, and water.

Four pillars of the earth and four directions – east, west, north, and south.

Another example is found in the Garden of Eden, where a single river symbolizes the flow of life from God, divided into four branches.

10 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; 12 and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (Genesis 2:10-14)

The Pishon represents abundance and the richness of [God](#)'s creation.

Gihon is often associated with life and fertility. The Tigris symbolizes the flow of history and divine guidance. At the same time, the

Euphrates represents longevity and nourishment, serving as a vital resource for civilizations.

We humans used to walk on all fours. But once we stood up on two legs, we aimed for the skies, recognized God, and began to worship, which is one of the most distinctive activities that distinguishes humans from other animals.

So, with you, I thank God that we have St. John's Community of Faith as our place of worship. By the way, why do we worship? What motivates you to come to church every Sunday? Worship is a modern form of an ancient animal sacrifice. Sacrifice means to make sacred. It involves making myself holy, my family holy, my community holy, and my country holy.

A Psalmist says, **"Extol the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain,
for the Lord our God is holy. (Psalm 99:9)**

Holy people believe in the Holy God, who is living and active in and with us still today. For example, this week, the Nobel Committee decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize 2025 to Maria Corina Machado, the opposition leader of Venezuela, ***for her tireless work promoting democratic rights for the people of Venezuela and for her struggle to achieve a just and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy.***

It didn't go to Mr. Trump. That makes the Nobel Peace Prize holy and sacred.

Another Psalmist encourages, Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! (Psalm 150:6)

St. Paul warns those who fail to worship God:

21 for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (Romans 1:21-22)

That is the reality of the world we face today. Mr. Trump is one of the best examples of shameless and senseless hearts, which have led America and the world astray.

The second element of the church is the building. Today, I thank those who built this sanctuary 153 years ago. It will be 154 years old when we hold the anniversary service in two weeks. I also thank those who maintain the building, including property committee members, trustees, and financial supporters.

The third element that defines the church is faith. We are the umbrella of the large tent of the United Church of Canada. Our denomination is not perfect, but it's quite good: welcoming and inclusive, progressive and apologetic. As a progressive organization, we sometimes make mistakes. But we apologize when we recognize them.

The Bible is the final element that shaped the church. Every major religion worldwide has its own Holy Scriptures. We have the Bible, which consists of 66 books. It should be proclaimed and properly interpreted from the pulpit every Sunday. Besides music, St. John's must be a Bible-centered church. That is the main reason you asked me to teach and preach based on the Bible.

This is personal. I believe I mentioned it the other day. This year, my daughter told me she had started reading the Bible. Two weeks later, she called me and said, "It is too hard to read." "It doesn't make sense." That's because the Bible is full of hidden, codified, and sealed truths. That is why I wrote books for the next generation.

A couple of Sundays ago, a lady approached me right after the morning service. She said, "Sungmin, my son told me that the Bible makes sense now. I sent your message to him every Sunday." I think he is my age. He was lost, but now he is found through the Bible.

Jo Rains mentioned the other day, during my visit to her at Riverwood, that she sent our Sunday Service YouTube video to 4 or 5 friends in Canada. I thanked her for sharing the Good News of Christ, even from a hospital bed, which made my days here at St. John's more meaningful.

So, let us continue worshiping God with gratitude and thanksgiving to God: "So, let us shine the light of Christ, peace, justice, you in your small corner, and I in mine" (VU # 585). Amen.

Mission Story <https://united-church.ca/thanksgiving>

Invitation to the Offering

Regardless of the harvest, God calls us to live with respect in creation, irrespective of the growing conditions. Through the gifts that come from your care and generosity, you support sustainable and just living conditions locally and around the world. We also give thanks for the labor and time of farmers, ranchers, market gardeners, conservationists, migrant workers, and countless volunteers who care for the earth and its creatures. In gratitude, we present our offering.

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

Offertory Hymn

VU # 227 For the Fruit of All Creation 1 & 3

Prayer of Dedication

Thank you, Gracious God. Gratitude is the foundation of our giving.

And so we thank you for all you have entrusted to each of us individually.

We thank you for this church you have entrusted to us together.

Thank you for leading us to give ourselves away by always sharing time, talents, and resources to your glory. Amen.

- *Elaine Bidgood Sweet, First Lutheran, Rugby and Leeds, North Dakota*

** Closing Hymn VU # 520 We Plough the Fields

Commissioning - *inspired by Proverbs 3:5–6*

This can be a week to count our past blessings.

Which ones were truly great, and which ones were disappointing?

Which ones were received by grace, and which by our own force?

This can be a week to take stock of past woes.

Which ones were truly awful, and which had silver linings?

Which ones did we give to God, and which were guarded as our own problems?

This is a week to trust in God with all your heart and perhaps lean a little less on our own understandings.

Let us go forth, counting on the blessing of God in our lives.

- *Karen Boivin, Osgoode-Kars U.C., Ottawa, On*

Sung Blessing: Go Now in Peace

Postlude