

Call to Worship

Give thanks to God! **We thank God for joy, for laughter, for abundant blessings of every kind.**

Give thanks to God at all times and for everything!

We thank God, when we can and as we can, for struggles, for solitude, for fears.

Give thanks to God at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**We thank God that, in Christ, our joys as well as our pain,
our losses as well as our laughter, are in God's heart and hands.**

Prayer of Invocation

We thank you gracious God, for all that you have given us: the land and its resources, freedom and its rights and responsibilities, the joy of sharing, the wonders of new life, and the gift of this day. Guide us to be ever mindful of all you have done for us that we might never stop giving thanks for all things great and small. Amen.

The Word

Psalm 100

Shout triumphantly to the LORD, all the earth!

Serve the LORD with celebration! Come before him with shouts of joy!

Know that the LORD is God—he made us; we belong to him.

We are his people, the sheep of his own pasture.

Enter his gates with thanks; enter his courtyards with praise!

**Thank him! Bless his name! Because the LORD is good, his loyal love lasts forever;
his faithfulness lasts generation after generation.**

Living the Word

This Thanksgiving I had a new plan. Last year, there were ten at the table and I served six vegetables (including potatoes), two meats, three breads (which included the stuffing) and a variety of six beverage options. There were way too many leftovers... This year only eight were at the table, so my plan was to cut back to half as much food.

I would make 2 easy pumpkin pies. I found canned pumpkin, already spiced, just needing milk and eggs for a 9 inch pie. I bought two. Thanksgiving Day I found that I only had one with the spices and the other can was just the pumpkin for two pies. After a second take, I calmly thanked God that I had time to make a third crust and moved forward.

The plan went so well for our 2pm dinner. I called my daughter-in-law to see how close she was to coming with the turkey and dressing and she said she would be ready in time for our 3pm dinner.

A mis-communication, but no problem, I would do a slow hold on everything else, thankful that we had an oven and microwave to heat and reheat as needed.

Somehow when they arrived with a beautiful looking turkey on the outside, it still wasn't done on the inside... Not a problem – Donald carved what was near done and Jeff took it out and grilled it. The whole meal ended up even tastier than we thought it would be and I gave thanks for the adaptability of all present. All in all lots to be thankful for.

Our scripture today is Psalm 100. How many of you memorized this verse, maybe in a different Bible Version? When I first learned them, the lines that I was most confused by at that time were: "*Know that the LORD is God—he made us; we belong to him. We are his people, the sheep of his own pasture. Enter his gates with thanks; enter his courtyards with praise!*"

That first line I just read: "*Know that the Lord is God.*" This is a powerful statement, with much more meaning when said with the emphasis on the last two words. God, the one true God. We are thanking the Creator of the Universe. Do you realize how big this God is? How big is the God in your life?

Big enough to be thanked with at least a small, simple thank you? How much thanks? How often? Seven times? Seventy times seven? Forgiveness comes to us at least that often from this One, true God...Paul says we should pray unceasingly, is it the same with thanks? Should we be thanking God, giving the Creator all the credit, all the time?

"He made us." So if God wanted more thanks why didn't he make it an automatic response in us? built right in? And of course the answer to that one comes with the gift we are given of free will to choose for ourselves. God wants to know if we will remember to be thankful. The Psalmist wrote Psalm 100 to remind us who we are and who God is.

"We are God's people, the sheep of God's pasture." You have to have read some more of the Bible to not be offended that you are being called a sheep, and animal. This Psalm is attributed to King David, who grew up as a shepherd boy. These words are from his own back yard. Our yards may look different, but we can understand that he meant it as a term of endearment to be called: 'God's sheep'.

"Enter his gates with thanks; enter his courtyards with praise!" So many things have changed in the last 4000 years. Can you imagine life without cars or TV? Only camels and campfires? We should realize that without deeper study of those times, without exploring the passages of scripture that come before us, our knowledge is limited.

The only gates I could think of were 'heaven's gates., 'those I intend to enter with thanksgiving in my heart someday, pearly gates, streets of gold, all good stuff for eternity... yet the sheep's gate was the one that the sheep entered after living in the pastures, day and night, for most of their lives. At the tabernacle or temple the sheep's gate was the one they entered for slaughter.

Whoa! Hold on! What was that? Is there another gate I can use? I want to have the gate we began this service with *"I will enter God's gate with Thanksgiving in my heart."* Upbeat, happy! Is there a different scripture for me? What was David thinking?

Thankfulness is an attitude. If you go into everything feeling owed by the world, focused on yourself, assuming that you go through alone and your life had no purpose except your own self-focus, then you have little to be thankful for and the sheep's gate will be really scary. But if you face the gate and all of life knowing that it is only the sheep's gate on this, one side and God's gate on the other side, there is no fear in giving of yourself to God's work for others and a lot to be thankful for..

It isn't always easy. We give as we can, our attitude needs adjusting at times. Sometimes it takes a long time to get to the attitude that leads to thanksgiving. Those can be growth times until we can get better at it. This morning for the call to worship, Lois read to you: *"Give thanks to God at all times and for everything!"* That is a noble goal, and you responded: *"We thank God, when we can and as we can, for struggles, for solitude, for fears."* This is a statement to share as we continue to face the struggles, the solitude and the fears – never alone.

We are all in this together. Receiving a simple 'thank you' can make all of the difference in your day. Sharing one can make someone else thankful, when they hadn't really thought to be. Tuesday's mail brought to me a simple thank you note from Regional Hospice. It read *"Dear Pastor Cathy, Thank you so much for arranging to have us speak at the Ministerial meeting about hospice and palliative care. We sure appreciate the opportunity to get out information about our service. Very warmly, Sherry & staff"*

I was surprised. I had asked them to come to GHAMA – the Ministerial, because I needed a slot filled at the meeting to make myself look good as the new president. I thanked them as they arrived, as I was glad that they made me look good. It was a very informative presentation and I had thanked Regional Hospice very warmly after they spoke, because even though it was begun on my own agenda, God has used it for all who were present. They in turn surprised me by sending me a thank you; one I only half deserved. So I gave all the praise to God.

Monday evening was the beginning of another example this week: A call came from Clam Lake from a man whose bike had broke down and he needed a lift to the Bike Shop in Hayward. I found volunteers from this church who went and got him. The bike part wasn't coming until Wednesday so we helped him on those chilly nights by allowing him to sleep in the church. I shared his story with the singers who joined me at the nursing home on Tuesday and gifts of food arrived to keep him going.

He is gone now; finishing his ride from Green Bay to Minneapolis, where he and his bike will fly back to his home near the arctic circle, Alaska and his security job with the pipeline. He left behind many stories of 'adventuring' around the world. He also shared that he has a need to leave Alaska this time of year because he needs a break from the solitude up there.

He spoke of the church he helped build and the camper park and shelter for visitors. He asked me to invite any of you who want to visit! There was also a Thank You Note left behind: "Thank you for helping me out along my trip. I enjoyed meeting all of you. I hope to see you again someday. Thanks, Matthew Connor, Cold Foot, Alaska

How I faced the traumas of Thanksgiving Day – a week of simple thank yous reminded me along with the scripture that we are here to open ourselves to the sacrifice of the wants of others, in order to experience thanksgiving near us..

How do we become thankful? There is a wonderful story in the book of Acts, chapter 16: ²² *The crowd joined in the attacks against Paul and Silas, so the authorities ordered that they be stripped of their clothes and beaten with a rod.* ²³ *When Paul and Silas had been severely beaten, the authorities threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to secure them with great care.* ²⁴ *When he received these instructions, he threw them into the innermost cell and secured their feet in stocks.*

²⁵ *Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.* ²⁶ *All at once there was such a violent earthquake that it shook the prison's foundations. The doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose.* ²⁷ *When the jailer awoke and saw the open doors of the prison, he thought the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself.* ²⁸ *But Paul shouted loudly, "Don't harm yourself! We're all here!"*

²⁹ *The jailer called for some lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.* ³⁰ *He led them outside and asked, "Honorable masters, what must I do to be rescued?"*

Thankfulness changes our Potential. Thankfulness causes us to see what God is doing through us instead of what God is doing to us. We are thankful when we are purposely praising God, instead of pitying ourselves.

Thankfulness changes our Perspective. I Thessalonians 5:16-18: ⁶ *Rejoice always.* ¹⁷ *Pray continually.* ¹⁸ *Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Thankfulness causes us to recognize God's Will instead of our own. We are thankful when we purposely choose God's Will instead of our own.

Thankfulness changes our Purpose. Romans 8:28,31: *We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.* ³¹ *So what are we going to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?*

Thankfulness causes us to want God's purpose instead of better circumstances. We are thankful when we purposely welcome God's working in our lives to form us into the image of Christ.

The benefits of Thankfulness. In getting our eyes focused on God, we have the potential of being used to help form others by our Creator.

I am not sure what songs Paul and Silas were singing while they were in prison after being beaten and chained, yet it must have been powerful. The song we will sing next could have been powerful enough to be the one, though it wasn't written until around 1869. Robert Lowery is believed to have authored it along with "Nothing but the Blood of Jesus" (UMH 362), "Shall We Gather at the River" (UMH 723), and "Up from the Grave He Arose" (322).

The words begin with a statement of thanksgiving: *My life flows on in endless song, above earth's lamentation.* The singing is beyond the reach of the lamenting for what they do not have.

I hear the clear, though far off hymn that hails a new creation. He is saying that his belief is beyond what this world offers. There is great hope for a better future.

And the real power comes in the refrain. *No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to this Rock I'm clinging. Since Love is Lord of Heaven and Earth, how can I keep from singing?*

Lord, as we sing and ponder these words, help us to know your power and security in our lives. Amen.

I invite you to join me in singing hymn #2212 *My Life Flows On*