

"Still Thinking Greater: Abundance and Thanksgiving" Deuteronomy 26:1-5a,10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-11

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October 29, 2017 Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost

Hayward United Methodist Church

### Call to Worship

God offers healing and wholeness upon all people.

**God lifts us from the dust and make us little less than the angels, forgiving our sins and granting us new life each day.**

Truly God's steadfast love endures forever - and we are thankful for it.

**May we be graced on this special day with hearts and minds that embrace the commitment that God has made to us as we dedicate our commitments to God.**

### Prayer of Invocation

**Almighty God, all around us are signs of your gracious bounty. Your gifts to us are so many we can hardly list them before you. Keep us from taking any of them for granted or thinking that we are totally deserving of them.**

**This morning, may we count our blessings and remember always that it is your nature to give and not count the cost. Be with us now as we come in gratitude to you, in the name of Jesus, your greatest gift to us. Amen.**

### The Word *Deuteronomy 26:1-5a,10*

When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it,

**you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.**

You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us."

**When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "Now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God.**

### Living the Word

"Abundance and Commitment"

Seven weeks ago we began a celebration which included the review of the past year of 'thinking greater.' We have reviewed the four ministries of the church: the ministry of Outreach, Nurture & Care Ministry, the ministry of Worship and the ministry of Education.

We have spent the whole year proving what can be done with the abundance we are given. Last year I said that God has not called us to sit on our pile of abundance, but to be generous in sharing it with each other and those outside our doors. I invited you to feel with your heart instead of just thinking with your brain and then to 'think greater.' And you have.

Sharing an overview of the ministries of this church during these past weeks I felt as if I was just making lists for you. Yet, some of you have commented that this exercise of listing all that we do in ministry has helped you realize how much we are able to do working together as a church family. As a pastor, I often get so busy 'doing,' that I don't realize that you as the congregation may not be able to see the whole picture.

We can feel really good about all of that, but it should not be about the 'Pride' in what you, or I or all of us together have done, but Thanksgiving at what God has made it possible for each of us to be a part of. We can only do anything at all because our Creator has given us the ability and talents to be creative ourselves.

Sit back and reflect now as I invite you to take in a song with me: "All Good Gifts" from the musical "Godspell."

*We plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land..  
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand..  
He sends us snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain...  
The breezes and the sunshine, and soft refreshing rain...*

*All good gifts around us are sent from Heaven above  
Then thank the Lord, thank the Lord for all his love...*

*We thank thee then, O Father, for all things bright and good,  
The seedtime and the harvest, our life our health our food,  
No gifts have we to offer for all thy love imparts  
But that which thou desirest, our humble thankful hearts!*

Instead of feeling prideful of what we have done, we can have 'humble, thankful hearts' for what God gives us the opportunity to do together. We are 'still thinking greater' as we go into this next year.

In the Deuteronomy scripture we read together this morning, we were reminded that for 5000 years humanity has been called to giving not just a part of what we have received, but the 'first fruits.' When we give back the first portion to God, there is always enough for ourselves, because we are giving out of our faith not out of our fear; out of our abundance, not out of our scarcity. There is always enough because we are remembering in the act of putting God first, that it was, and is, all God's to begin with.

We can just follow the path God put before Christ and know that Christ is continually teaching us. Part of that path is walked in thanksgiving and encouragement for others.

I have use a devotional book by Sarah Young entitled "Jesus Calling." It is written as if Jesus is speaking to me personally, every morning. Wednesday's message seemed to fit in this spot for this morning: Here these words as Jesus speaks to you: *"I am God with you, for all time and throughout eternity. My perpetual presence with you can be a continual source of Joy, springing up and flowing out in streams of abundant life. Let your mind reverberate with meanings of my names: Jesus – the Lord saves, and Emmanuel – God with us. Strive to remain conscious of my Presence even in your busiest moments. Talk with Me about whatever delights you, whatever upsets you, whatever is on your mind. These tiny steps of daily discipline, taken one after the other, will keep you close to Me on the path of life."*

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-11, the Apostle Paul writes these words of encouragement to the church at Corinth. Though 2000 years ago, the same message could have been written for us today, listen to what Paul says... Reading from The Message Version of the Bible:

*Now, friends, I want to report on the surprising and generous ways in which God is working in the churches in Macedonia province. Fierce troubles came down on the people of those churches, pushing them to the very limit. That trial exposed their true colors: They were incredibly happy, though desperately poor. The pressure triggered something totally unexpected: an outpouring of pure and generous gifts. I was there and saw it for myself. They gave offerings of whatever they could—far more than they could afford!—pleading for the privilege of helping out in the relief of poor Christians.*

*This was totally spontaneous, entirely their own idea, and caught us completely off guard. What explains it was that they had first given themselves unreservedly to God and to us. The other giving simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives. That's what prompted us to ask Titus to bring the relief offering to*

*your attention, so that what was so well begun could be finished up. You do so well in so many things—you trust God, you're articulate, you're insightful, you're passionate, you love us—now, do your best in this, too.*

*I'm not trying to order you around against your will. But by bringing in the Macedonians' enthusiasm as a stimulus to your love, I am hoping to bring the best out of you. You are familiar with the generosity of our Master, Jesus Christ. Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us—in one stroke he became poor and we became rich.*

*So here's what I think: The best thing you can do right now is to finish what you started last year and not let those good intentions grow stale. Your heart's been in the right place all along. You've got what it takes to finish it up, so go to it. Once the commitment is clear, you do what you can, not what you can't.*

I can't say it any better than that. Once the commitment is clear in your mind for you, then you do what you can, not what you aren't able to. It is between you and God to decide. I know that God will provide what we need, for the ministries that God would have us do.

Your commitment from all that you have: time, talents, finances, prayers, all of it together, decides what we can do. We need commitments for all parts of the ministries for them to happen.

Today we make our commitment for next year. I think it is good for us to do this once a year as a reminder of who we are as we continue to receive God's gifts in our lives. It isn't just for the people who are members according to the church book, but for all, who with a Christian heart, come to serve God through the ministries of this church.

Last November, exactly 11 months ago this week, we received seven people into full membership of this church, acknowledging that they were already members of the family of Christ. As part of the welcome to them, we renewed our commitment, faithfully to participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness. The commitment cards you bring forward this morning are a gathering of that same covenant to move this church forward in ministry for next year.

None of us can do this alone, but together we become a 'greater thought' for the future of this church, for our community and for our world. You can be filled with pride this morning, but not for what you have done, rather that you have listened to God's call to serve others and we are accomplishing great things in the name of Jesus Christ, to the Glory of God.

Three weeks ago someone shared with me that there was a buzz in the air. That wasn't just about the German Food to be served at the end of that week, but about those brains that are 'Still Thinking Greater' around here. Now that is really something to be thankful for...