

Worship at home

Series: "Gratitude: It's more than an Attitude"

September 20, 2020

Call to worship (responsive):

One: Give thanks to the Lord.

All: We will call on God's name and make known God's wonderful works.

One: Seek the Lord continually.

All: We will watch and listen for sign of God's grace.

One: Together let us worship God!

All: Let us rejoice in God's presence and praise God's holy name.

Prayers of praise and confession:

Good and gracious God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;

You meet us in so many places and in so many different ways.

You draw near to us to draw us near to you.

In gratitude, we come before you this day,

to seek your word for us,

and to enjoy your gift of life in its fullness.

Giver of all good gifts,

we confess that far too often we take your gifts for granted,

we feel entitled to goodness,

and we fail to give thanks in thought, word, and deed.

We confess that we become mired in the mundane,

fail to see your grace present in our experiences,

and we lose the gift of reverence.

We confess that we continue to be governed by beliefs contrary to your will,

we fail to embrace your word,

and too often mirror the chaos and despair around us

instead of the light that is the hope of resurrection.

Remind us of your grace and mercy,

rekindle in us the assurance that, because you live, we shall live also.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Assurance

The mercy of our God is from everlasting to everlasting. Friends, hear and believe the good news of the Gospel. In Jesus Christ, God's generous love reaches out to embrace us.

In Christ, we are forgiven and set free to begin again. Thanks be to God!

Hymn #18 "Through all the changing scenes of life"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBkorDtz1nU>

Prayers of supplication, intercession and the Lord's Prayer:

God of Hope,

When the world is bleak and dim, you pierce the shadows with light.

We pray today for those who feel hopeless; for those who are sick or dying;
for those who mourn; and for those weighed down.

May each of us know and share your gift of hope.

God of Peace,

All around us there is conflict:

in our world, our communities, our families, even our closest relationships.

We pray today for places where pain, violence and cruelty seem to have the upper hand.

May each of us know and share your gift of peace.

God of Joy,

We give you thanks for moments of delight and occasions of celebration.

We remember those who do not taste such joy;

those who are lonely or bitter, hurt, or difficult to love.

May each of us know and share your gift of joy.

God of Love,

In Jesus Christ, your love was born in a human life.

We pray for our families, those closest to us and anyone estranged.

We pray for friends and for acquaintances,

for strangers, for those very different from ourselves, and even for our enemies.

Help us draw our circles of affection wider, seeing our kinship with all people.

May each of us know and share your gift of love.

Hear us now as we pray in silence for those who have come to mind this day.

(Silence.)

And now, in one voice, we pray the prayer that Jesus taught.

The Lord's Prayer

Scripture and sermon:

Savour the goodness of the Lord

Last Sunday we began our sermon series “Gratitude: It’s more than an Attitude” by noticing that giving thanks to the Lord is one way we sing the Lord’s song despite our present circumstances. Or, in the words of Psalm 137: “in a foreign land.” Our first reading today describes the ritual of the sacrifice of thanksgiving. This was one of three rituals which comprised the sacrifice of well-being. It was an occasion to celebrate; to sing the Lord’s song.

The first part of the Leviticus reading describes in a general way the ritual of the sacrifice of well-being and the second part describes the specifics of the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

READ LEVITICUS 3:1-5; 7:11-15.

READ PSALM 34:1-10.

It’s easy to read the book of Leviticus and all the detailed descriptions of the sacrifices and rituals as an ancient law book with little relevance today. And, maybe because of how they’ve been preached in the past or how they’re portrayed in the popular imagination, the descriptions of the ancient sacrificial system can sound odd to our ears, even uncomfortable. They can seem dark and foreboding; the tools of an angry and judgmental god.

I want to challenge that.

I want to encourage you to try and put yourself in that time and imagine what the experience would have been like. What would you have seen? What would you have smelt? What would you have tasted? What would you have heard? What would you have felt with your hands? And after, when you traveled home and carried on with your business, what memories would have remained with you? Would you remember the sights or the smells? The tastes or the sounds of laughter, of sharing stories, of tears?

The sacrifice of thanksgiving was a voluntary offering offered by someone in response to something good they had received. Living out of the perspective of faith, the Israelites accepted that all good gifts came from Yahweh. And so, it might have been that the worshiper had recovered from a serious illness; perhaps they had been delivered from some specific season of suffering, or had received some other significant blessing. If you want some fuel for your meditations, Psalm 107 provides a litany of reasons to offer a thanksgiving sacrifice. In response

to a specific experience of Yahweh's active grace, the worshiper would invite their family and friends and travel to the temple in Jerusalem.

Once at the temple, they would offer an animal. It could have been a male or female from the bovine family, or a sheep, or a goat. It had to be without blemish as it was to take the place of the beloved and sin-stained worshiper. The worshiper would lay their hand on the beast (symbolically giving their life as an offering through the life of the animal) and kill it. The source of the animal's life would be spread on the altar symbolizing that the worshiper was renewing their commitment to give their own life in love and service to Yahweh. And then the fat and organs would be burned on the grill of the altar. As the worshiper watched the smoke rise and smelled the fat sizzling on the grill, they would remember the grace they had received from Yahweh and that Yahweh invited them to join Him in the sacred barbecue that symbolized life in relationship with our Creator. (This is the pleasing odour that represented Yahweh's portion of the sacred meal.)

In addition to the burnt offering, the grateful worshiper would offer unleavened wafers and cakes. The grain offering recognized God's grace in providing what is needed to live. Unleavened to remind the community of God's goodness in delivering them from slavery in all its forms (represented by the Exodus from Egypt.)

And finally, in what is unique to the sacrifice of thanksgiving, the worshiper would provide an offering of leavened bread. Not to be burnt on the altar, but to be eaten together with the grilled meat from the sacrifice in a meal shared between the worshiper, their family and friends, and God. A meal at which they could taste the meat and bread, be surrounded by the smells of the sizzling fat and the cooking meat, hear the laughter of friends and family coming together, and listen to the story of how Yahweh had been good to the worshiper.

The sacrifice of thanksgiving was a sacred barbecue. It was an occasion of joy and celebration. It moved the worshiper beyond having an attitude of gratitude. Their gratitude become embodied by the smells, sounds, sights, and tastes.

They could literally taste and see the goodness of the Lord. And, as they traveled home and carried on with their business, the smells, tastes, and sounds would become stored in their memory. A sensory reminder of the presence of goodness in a world of chaos and uncertainty.

The sacrifice of thanksgiving is an invitation to sing the Lord's song by learning to savour specific moments of grace, to store the experience in one's memory, to give thanks to the Lord, and to invite others to celebrate the goodness of the Lord with you.

What God has known from the beginning; what the Israelites' learned through experience, ritual and prayers; what Jesus taught; and what the first Christian church leaders continuously reminded their congregations through their letters, psychology has now proven. Learning to savour moments of grace, to experience them in a holistic and embodied way, to store them in memory to be relived later, and to express gratitude is good for the soul.

Experts say that savouring positive experiences by being mindful of the senses, by expressing gratitude, and by storing the experiences in memory helps us to be reassured of the existence of goodness and, simultaneously guards us from taking goodness for granted. Life with all its smells, sounds, tastes, textures, and sights is a gift. And goodness, with all its smells, sounds, tastes, textures, and sights exists and is a gift.

Earlier this week as I was cooking breakfast my son asked if we could read a story. Fighting my baser instinct to refuse his request on the grounds that the eggs might burn and, anyway, I had to get to work, I chose instead to sit on the couch and read with him. As I drove to my office later that morning, I reflected on those 5 minutes. I remember the feel of the couch's fabric, the smell and sound of the eggs sizzling and becoming very brown on the stove, the warmth of my son beside me, the feel of his stuffed animal on my lap. I could see, touch, smell, and (when we eventually sat down to eat) taste, the goodness God has brought into my life. Savouring God's grace, I said "thank you" and was able to keep that memory throughout the day. Later, as we struggled through our evening routine, and I could feel my muscles tightening and my lungs constricting, as we argued about baths and teeth brushing, I could also remember the feel of the couch, the sound of the story. I could breathe and remember that God is real, God is good, God is able, and God is bigger than our momentary struggles.

My experience is perhaps a far cry from being delivered from a life-threatening illness or a storm at sea which might have precipitated our Hebrew ancestors to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Nevertheless, throughout each day we experience moments of God's grace.

Robert Emmons, who is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis and whose research focusses on the psychology of gratitude, joy, and grace, wrote in an article

for the Greater Good website that when you can savour positive experiences and express gratitude, you affirm the existence of goodness and you recognize that the source of such goodness is outside of yourself.

(https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good)

For disciples of Jesus, this should not be an earth-shaking revelation.

The triune God in whom we live, move, and have our being; who revealed his name to Moses as “Yahweh”; who we know through the man named “Yahweh saves”, or, Jesus is real. He is good. And He is able. Through the cross, the empty tomb, and in the mystery of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has inaugurated his kingdom in our present experiences. Every minute of our day is lived in the presence of the God of grace.

The challenge is that we are so surrounded by external forces such as chaos and fear, illness and bodies that no longer function as they once did; and by internal forces such as broken hearts and boredom, pride and entitlement that we might not recognize the moments of grace when they happen. Yet, when you pause in prayer you begin to see with the eyes of faith that assure you God is real, God is good, God is able; and goodness is a gift.

As disciples of Jesus we are invited to savour the goodness of the Lord and to give thanks.

We needn't slaughter an ox or goat and have a barbecue, one of the pieces of advice experts give is to record your experiences. To keep a written or recorded “gratitude journal” or to write a prayer. Be specific about your experience. And then to tell others. Begin your story with “I give thanks to the Lord because...” or, simply, “Come and listen to what God has done!”

That's what I want us to do now. Let us practice savouring God's goodness by offering our own sacrifice of thanksgiving.

I want us to collectively write a Prayer of Thanksgiving that is specific to our community and our period of history. In light of your prayers, experiences, and travels with Jesus over the past 7 months, name one or two experiences you have had in which you have realized the good, active, presence of God and God's grace for which you give thanks to the LORD. Those of you who are listening online or reading the print version, give me a phone call or send me an email with your contribution. I want to then gather our experiences and create a prayer which we can

use for a few weeks to remind us of the presence of goodness and help us savour the grace of God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, I'll go first. As I think over the past several months, I give thanks to the Lord for the midwives of Sarnia-Lambton. For their calm presence and reassuring smiles. For their collective wisdom and passion to reclaim childbirth as a natural and awe-inspiring trust. And, related, I give thanks to the Lord for the trust He has given myself and Hannah in caring for not only our son but now our daughter. For the experience of seeing an infant smile, and listening to a three-year-old tell a story. And, I give thanks to the Lord for the frustrations, for the feelings of my lungs constricting and muscles tightening that inspire me to examine my own motivations and change so that God's beloved children can flourish.

Who's next?

Prayers of thanksgiving:

Doxology (#830)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_shjZj81yE

Charge and blessing:

Remember as you go into the week that you go in the presence and goodness of the God we know in Jesus Christ through the indwelling mystery of the Holy Spirit.

And give thanks.

And may the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore.

Amen.