



Westminster Presbyterian Church

Eugene, Oregon

“At Home” Worship

November 8, 2020

WORSHIP NOTE:

Before you begin to worship this morning, please find a candle and place within your worship space. If you do not have a candle a flashlight will do. Or, you can just find a pen/piece of paper.

Gathering Around God’s Word

There is now a complete worship experience posted on the church’s YouTube Channel or on the website: www.wpceugene.org under the Worship Menu by selecting Sermons.

Leading in Worship Today:

Ursula Damgaard, Music Director

The Rev. Marta Z. Ukropina

Karen Young, Liturgist

Darlene Valtinson, Vocals

Call to Worship

Rejoice and be glad!

For God is our salvation.

Rejoice and be glad!

For God is great.

See all that God has done.

Come, let us give thanks and praise to our creator.

Let us worship God.

Opening Hymn

Now Thank We All Our God

#643

Call to Confession

Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus and his righteousness. Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin that we might find forgiveness and new life in Christ.

Prayer of Confession

Holy and gracious God, you are all light and wonder and glory. You are our strength and our delight; you give us all we need to live. Yet we are distracted by all that glitters, continually grasping for more. Rather than trust in your provision, we chase after our own happiness. Forgive us, Lord, and turn us back to you. Overwhelm us with your goodness, cover us with your grace, and help us to be ever thankful to you. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news: nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The Word

Prayer for Illumination

Gracious God, as your word is read and proclaimed to us today, help us to hear where you may be leading us. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 28:6-9

Blessed be the Lord, for he has heard the sound of my pleadings. The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. The Lord is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed. O save your people, and bless your heritage; be their shepherd, and carry them forever.

New Testament Reading: Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Anthem

Johann Friedrich Burgmuller

Study No.2/Etude No.2

Morning Bell/La cloche du matin

Sermon

The Rev. Marta Z Ukropina

“Thanksgiving”

A little word about this sermon. Writing sermons and preparing for Sunday worship has changed considerably, as have many things, during this pandemic time. You see, in order to have the service in your hand by Sunday, the worship service must be complete by Wednesday. We need to mail the service Thursday morning to those who receive a hard copy and we need to stitch the various video parts of the service together. This week is an exciting week as it is the first week we have a complete video service including music and liturgists! It is a step, yet again, to help us along the path leading eventually to a return to in person worship. There are a lot of moving parts, but thanks to the gifts of many, we are able to worship together despite being separated by the pandemic. So as has become the new norm, as I begin writing this; it is Monday. Election Day is tomorrow. We are staring down a week that is unknown and full of anxiety for many.

I have been worried about this sermon. I keep thinking—well what if the events of this week dictate a completely different sermon than what I would sit to write on Monday? But hymns and liturgy needed to be selected and a service needed to be planned. And I decided that for this week I would focus on a sermon and a worship service that would speak to us no matter what the week brings. Because isn't that always the case anyway? We never know what a week will bring. Even with our best planning, plans can shatter mid flight. Good things can happen that we never even dreamed about or likewise, bad things can happen in the blink of an eye. We never know what a week (or a day for that matter) holds for us. And, edited to add—I am putting the finishing touches on this sermon and it is now Wednesday morning. We are all anxiously awaiting election results that may still take a few days to come in. There is a lot of uncertainty and unrest in our country. Maybe by the time you read or listen to this sermon results will be complete, but at this writing things are very much unknown. But, I have to “get it done” so to speak so here it goes. Because no matter what the rest of

this week brings, God's Word holds true and in response to God's Word and Truth in our lives we are all to give thanks. Yes, you heard me—even in this week where we feel like we are on pins and needles we are to give thanks to God.

Here we are—already well into the first full week of November. It almost seems that in the blink of an eye, there has been a change of seasons once again.

Last Saturday was Halloween and next to Christmas it is probably most children's favorite holiday. As you know, WPC has an annual Trunk or Treat celebration that draws hundreds of children and their families to our parking lot for a fun, festive time. As with so many things, we had to cancel that this year and it was greatly disappointing. We did however have a Drive Thru Halloween for our youth and children. They came in costume and picked up a bucket of treats for their family. Hopefully you have seen the video of their great costumes and smiling faces. It was different, but we tried to make it something special for them. I know for me it was a special day as there is just something that makes me smile when I see kids decked out in different costumes.

This is a time of year many of us look forward to. It is a time for holidays and family—a time for football and soup! But this year, it is full of unknowns and uncertainty. It has been a season full of reminders once again that our country is very divided and we do not treat each other well. We blame and point fingers and in my opinion we dwell on the negative. It is also already a year full sadness as we look at more cancelled plans because of the pandemic. Back in the spring, we hoped that we would be back to some kind of "normal" by fall so that our special times with friends and family could go on safely as usual. But unfortunately, for many of us our Thanksgiving Tables have shrunk as we have had to cancel plans with loved ones we look forward to seeing each year. We always celebrate Thanksgiving with my cousin and her family. Thanks to 2020, we are not gathering this year and all of our kids (and adults) are

greatly disappointed as our family Thanksgiving is something they look forward to with joy each and every year! I know many of you are making the same hard decisions. I hear the words “It just isn’t fair.” both from others and echoing in my own head. It is hard to give thanks when we are feeling this way.

Which reminded me of one of my favorite books from childhood. I am going to share parts of it with you, because as I thought about this year and this week, it just met me where I am and perhaps it will meet you, too:

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. By Judith Viorst

In fact, I love it because I had this book sitting on my home desk. Audrey, our 8 year old, saw it and said: Oh I love that book—It is one of my favorites—can I read it? In my opinion, it is a book that speaks to us no matter our age or stage in life because we all have been there—we all have terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days.

Poor Alexander—he has a day where nothing goes right.—I feel like someone could be really creative here and rewrite this book for 2020. This seems to be the year where nothing goes right.

We can all relate to times where we feel like nothing goes right—on the surface it seems like there is nothing to be thankful for. It is a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day/week/year...And when we start to dwell on the negative that is sometimes all we see. Even good things or benign things seem difficult or horrible. We lose sight of joy and hope.

The secular celebration of Thanksgiving is only a few weeks away, but as Christians, we are called to live lives of Thanksgiving to God. It is not meant to be a one day event.

Each time I meet with the youth group or the kids group we close our time together with a thankfulness prayer. Everyone is invited to share one thing they are thankful for in that moment even if it has been a terrible, horrible, no good very bad day. We give thanks to God for

those things. They range from family, to pets, to great weather, to sports, to food, to health, etc. Their answers are all different but the sentiment is the same—we focus on directing our thanks to God.

Remember how I told you to find a candle before you listened to this sermon? Place that candle in front of you. I want you to take a moment to think of something you are thankful for in this moment—right now. Once you have that in your mind—light your candle. Think about what you named in thanksgiving before God.

Look at your candle and know that others are looking at theirs, too. Our candles today, represent a wide array of things we are thankful for. Some may be on the lighter side and others may be very serious, but they are all being directed to God.

I encourage you to make this a regular practice during the month of November. Light the candle each day and give thanks to God for something. You can even write them down and by the end of the month you should have quite a list. When we make it a practice to give thanks for something—even a little thing— we begin to see things in a more positive way. Giving thanks allows us to feel God’s joy and hope which always surrounds us—even on our terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days.

Giving thanks to God, of course, is a very Biblical thing. The word appears throughout the Old and New Testament and many people in the Bible give thanks to God: David, writers of Psalms, prophets, Paul and even Jesus. We are called to give thanks.

I came across a quote a few years ago but I do not remember much about its origin. But I remember its sentiment: It said “thanksgiving is a good thing, but thanksgiving is better.” And you know, I think that is what thanksgiving and giving thanks is all about. We should live our lives in thanks to God for all the many things God has blessed us with in our lives.

Our Psalm this morning states, “the Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.” But as the Psalmist says, God hears the

sound of our pleadings and is our strength and shield. Even on the no good, terrible, horrible bad days, God is there for us as our shepherd carrying us from danger. God sent Jesus to do just that—to overcome the power of sin and death leading us from times of danger to an abundance of grace. To me, that is worth giving thanks for in and of its self! I challenge each and everyone of us to find even a small thing to give thanks for in our lives each day even in this year we could describe as terrible, horrible and no good. Because some days, weeks, or years are just like that—even in Australia.

In offering thanks and praise to God, we can move from merely thanksgiving to thanksgiving. Living our lives in thanks is a way we can praise God for who God is and for all the blessings God gives us each and every day—most importantly for the gift of God’s son Jesus Christ! This is at the heart of Paul’s words to the Colossians: Listen to these words again: Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

So as you continue to process the results of what has been a tumultuous election year, as you continue to stay safe and healthy during the pandemic, and as you prepare for what is to be a very different holiday season, I encourage you to think about ways you can be thankful and then turn your giving thanks into living thanks. Clothe yourselves with love, exude Christ’s peace, treat one another kindly, and most importantly give thanks to God for all things. Live into that thanks. By living thanks we can exhibit the love of God in Christ in each one of our lives and give that love to our very divided, hurting world. We all have much to be thankful for—even

on Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Days, just look at the light in front of you! Amen.

Responding to God's Word

Affirmation of Faith—*from A Brief Statement of Faith*

We trust in God, whom Jesus called Abba, Father. In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation. In everlasting love, the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people to bless all families of the earth. Hearing their cry, God delivered the children of Israel from the house of bondage. Loving us still, God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant. Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home, God is faithful still.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Let us pray for the world, lifting up our thanksgivings and petitions to God.

We thank you for the many blessings you pour out to us each and every day. Sometimes it is hard to see them, so we pray that you would open our eyes and hearts so we recognize them.

We pray for all who seek your radiant light in the darkened corners of our world; may we find our way to you through our love for one another.

We pray for all who are oppressed by institutions and structures unjustly ordered; bless us with a joy for justice that all may share in the blessings of this life, walking in right relationship with you by caring for our neighbor.

We pray for all who have no work, for those without adequate health care, and for all who hunger or have no shelter. We pray for all who are sick and suffering. Bless us with meaningful work and ample provision, as we love and care for each other under the protection of your sheltering sky.

We pray for all who suffer violence on dangerous streets and in war-torn places; keep them from harms way. Bless us with your vision of peace, that all may flourish as one family under God with justice and freedom for all.

We remember before you all who have died that they may know your peace. Bless each of us with a sure and certain hope of the resurrection, that we may know our risen Lord, as we share eternal life in you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Sending of God's Word

Closing Hymn: *Let All Things Now Living* #63

Benediction

May God, who creates, redeems, and sustains, keep you fervent in faith, cheerful in hope, brimming in justice, and overflowing in love and thankfulness. And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.