

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
 East Moline, Illinois  
 Pastor Becky Sherwood  
**November 24, 2019, Christ the King Sunday**  
 Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Philippians 4:4-9  
**THANKSGIVING...TO GOD!**

Years ago, I had a friend, Mary Lou, who made an amazing New Year's resolution. Starting January 1<sup>st</sup>, and every day for 365 days, she wrote a hand-written thank you letter. She wrote letters to her family, her friends, people she saw on the news, famous people she admired, authors she loved, people in her neighborhood. She didn't start the year with a list, she started each day knowing that on that day she would pick someone. She didn't always know who it would be when she got up; she often spent a day listening and thinking. But she said that every day someone would come into her mind and heart, or she would hear about something, or remember someone she hadn't thought of in years, and she would find addresses and write to them.

At the end of that year she did have a list; a list of 365 people who had touched her life directly or indirectly by who they were. She said it changed her to spend a year being thankful and to spend a year looking at the ways so many people made her life better.

As we approach another Thanksgiving, it often reminds us that we are thankful to God for many things, the many ways that God is in our lives, and the lives of people we love. It may also remind us that we don't say thank you enough.

But does God really want us in that guilt spiral, of "I should be thankful, I'm not thankful enough, I'm horrible about that, God must think I'm horrible about it too, I should be thankful, I'm not thankful enough....and on the guilt spiral goes.

It seems to me that instead of the guilt spiral, God would much more like us to turn toward God with our thanksgivings, and just skip the spiral.

Back in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the German Priest, mystic and teacher Meister Eckhart said this: "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."

What I like about today's readings from the Bible is that they tell us that followers of God through the ages have needed to be reminded to say thank you. We aren't the only ones!

In the reading from Deuteronomy the Israelites were reminded that God had given them a new land, after their 40-year wandering from slavery in Egypt, to freedom. The best response to that gift of freedom from Egypt and the gift of a new land, was to take the very first things they grew each year and bring those as a gift to God. They were reminded to bow before God and say thank you for all that God had given them.

We have the annual Thanksgiving Holiday to remind us to say thank you, they had the first fruits of the harvest each year.

I got to see a glimpse of this thanksgiving to God for the harvest the year I lived in Northern Ireland. Late in the fall there was a Harvest Festival in the church each year. While it took place at the end of the harvest, the feelings of gratitude were similar to those of Israel at the beginning of the growing season. One of the farmers brought in a huge old wooden wagon wheel attached flat to a board. Inside each of the spokes of the wheel was the produce of the harvest from farms around the village. Brussel sprouts, potatoes, turnips, carrots, and parsnips filled section by section of the wagon wheel. Bundles of grain stood by the doors. Late autumn flowers filled the deep window ledges. The gifts of God filled the sanctuary. The benefit of living in a farming community was that the gifts of God weren't just on grocery shelves, they were right there in front of us.

30 years later I still remember the joy of saying thank you to God on that day. What I also loved was that at the end of that Harvest Service all the food was taken to hungry families, and the flowers were taken to homebound members.

It wasn't just in Old Testament times that God's people needed to be reminded to be thankful. In the reading from Philippians we hear Paul reminding the people then, and reminding us now: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice."

The Message translation puts it this way: "Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in God!"

As I thought about this morning's sermon, and giving thanks to God, (and wanting to avoid the guilt spiral), I decided we needed to explore the rest of this sermon together.

I decided that instead of me talking about the reasons for thanksgiving this morning, there was a better way.

Instead of me telling you how to rejoice, I'm going to invite each of you to "celebrate God and revel in God" yourself in the next few minutes.

So, this is the time to pull out the yellow insert in your bulletin, and to find the pen or pencil you are going to use. There was a wise woman in my last church who, when she was in her 90's, told me that her mother taught her to pray her thank you's for the simple things, with simple words. We are going borrow that wisdom from Marge's mother and avoid the "thees" and "thous" this morning. Each of us will write our own Prayer of Thanksgiving.

Then I hope when you get home today, you will find a place to be alone with God and pray this prayer out loud. So, you can really "celebrate God and revel in God!"

### **A Prayer of Thanksgiving, November 24, 2019**

**"Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in God!"** (Philippians 4:4, The Message)

**Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into the Lord's presence with singing.** (Psalm 100: 1-2)

Holy God you are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,  
(3 adjectives, descriptions of God)

Today I am thankful for you in my life.

Thank you for my eyes and for all the colors I see, including my favorite colors:

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank for my nose and the scent of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for my ears and the amazing sounds of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
and \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for my hands and the feel of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for my mouth and the taste of some of my favorite foods: \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Creating God, thank you for surrounding us with the beauty of the earth. Today I am especially thankful for these parts of your creation: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
and \_\_\_\_\_.

Inventive God, you have blessed my life with such amazing people. Today I praise you especially for the ways these people have touched my life: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

And creative God you created me! Today I thank you that I am: \_\_\_\_\_,  
 \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

Loving and saving Jesus, you came to our world to love and save each of us. Thank you for giving so much love away to us all, even before we knew how to love you.

Thank you for loving me when \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
 and \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for putting (*person's name or group of people*) \_\_\_\_\_ and  
 \_\_\_\_\_ in my life so I can show them your love.

You are the Light of the World, thank you for inviting us to shine your light! Help me to shine your light in/with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Holy Spirit of God, thank you for living in our hearts and lives.

You comfort us in times of sadness and grief. Thank you for caring for me when:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for caring for my loved ones when: \_\_\_\_\_  
 and \_\_\_\_\_.

In times of confusion you offer us the Deep Peace of Christ. Thank you for putting your peace into my heart when \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Most amazing God, our Creator, Savior and Comforter, I praise your name this day. There are so many more things to thank you for! Here are just a few more: \_\_\_\_\_,

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.  
 Amen! Alleluia! Amen!

**“If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.”** Meister Eckhart

**“Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving, and God’s courts with praise. Give thanks to the Lord, bless God’s name. For the Lord is good; God’s steadfast love endures forever, and God’s faithfulness to all generations.”** (Psalm 100:4-5)