

“Give Thanks for All that is Good”

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Psalm 145:1-5, 17--21

San Dimas UCC

You might notice that the bulletin cover today is my sermon title of last week. I took the liberty to switch today and last week's lectionary texts because today marks our stewardship celebration and our feast of thanksgiving. Today is indeed a day to give thanks, and the Psalm which Mary read is a song of praise to the source of all that is good. We join the psalmist today in blessing God's holy name!

In the UCC lectionary reflections, *Samuel's Seeds*, the writer says this “at the heart of our Jewish ancestors' faith, and at the heart of our faith, is the conviction that God has created us in love, that God remembers us, and that we need God and are expected to respond to God.

Now there's a hint of the opposite of that, or the consequences of such a reversal, in verse 20: “God watches over all who love God, but will destroy all the wicked.” As so often happens in the psalms, we're going along and everything is lovely, and suddenly the talk turns to God destroying people.” Let's address this “problem” first so we can go forward giving thanks for all that is good.

Clinton McCann offers the following response to this dilemma: “The happiness or prosperity of the righteous is not so much a reward as it is their experience of being connected to the true source of life -- God. Similarly, the destruction of the wicked is not so much a punishment as it is the result of their own choice to cut themselves off from the source of life.” As parents we call this natural consequences and we are always praying that these consequences will not have life long damaging effects but rather will be life lessons for growth.

Yet, most of this psalm is focused on human gratitude for God's gift of abundant life. It is about giving thanks for all that is good. Likewise stewardship, the giving of our time, talents, and money is our opportunity to join in the vision of how God intends for things to be.

Walter Bruggemann is a great theologian of the Hebrew Bible. He's a rather small person with a raspy, yet strong voice that has the power of a deep well of closeness to God's Spirit. He writes about this Psalm that **“Israel reflects on the free gift of food: the earth germinates, the seasons work, water, sunshine, breeding, production, nurture, availability. There is elemental generosity at the root of our human life in God's world. There is enough. Israel sings its lyrics of abundance.”** Israel knows that its source of life and its community is a gift of God. It is not of their own making. Bruggemann puts it this way: **“God set up “a coherent, viable, life-giving, life-permitted order...a place for life.”** (WB, *Theology of the Old Testament*).

We are to be co-creators with God for this **“a viable, life-giving, life permitted order...a place for life.”** This is what we are about at this church--creating a place for life: a place of life for our children who we watch with joy and wonder as they grow, a place for life as our elders are respected, loved and cared for and gratefully acknowledged for their steadfast devotion to this church over the years, and a place for life for those of us who seek a venue for doing mission and creating a space for the Spirit of God to be present, a place for life as we reach outward into the community and the world with acts of mercy and witness to the source of all that is good and the God to whom we give thanks, a place for life where we give thanks for all that is good. What we give to this church helps God make it a place for life.

In his book *Finally Comes the Poet*, Bruggemann describes our response to God this way: **“We bask in the overflow of creation; our song enacts the overflow. We discover that some of the abundance of God's generosity has been entrusted to our hand. As the singing proceeds, we begin to notice the grace of generosity emerging in our own life. When the**

song ends, the conversation in the choir continues. We are left with courage, freedom, and imagination, and we are given sufficient energy to care for the humanness, the humaneness, the humanization of the world. In the act of humanizing, the song of praise continues, for the creation does what the creator hopes.” Our gifts become a song of thanks for all that is good.

There's plenty in our world today to encourage a perception of doom and gloom. I don't need to dwell on it--you know what I mean. But today we take time out to give thanks and praise to God laying aside what is doom and gloom and giving praise for all that is good. We give thanks for our children, our families, and for all who nurture and create this space for life. We give thanks that God gives us--not just our biological families but the families that bind us together in Christian love. We celebrate that whatever we do, wherever we go, there are people worrying about us, and caring for us. This is what's right with our world and this is what we celebrate and give thanks for today.

I'm so pleased that my dear friends, Dick and Nancy, could be here today, because they were family for me during a very difficult time. They moved the girls and I to Claremont, 17 years ago on January 11, 1990, so that I could attend seminary and then they came up every month to fix my old car, bring food, bring joy, make sure the girls had new clothes for the start of school and for Christmas. Dick and Nancy gave me my first computer; I had no idea how much I would need it in seminary. Till the day I die, I will give thanks for all that they did to help the girls and I through that time.

You know, when you've known such generosity, you just naturally *pay it forward*. Over the years I've been able to give to others the way Dick and Nancy gave to me. Last Friday I had a chance to *pay it forward*--to pay for a plane ticket for a young man to visit his mother for Thanksgiving. When your heart is filled with gratitude, all you can do is give thanks for all that is good!

Today we celebrate what is right with the world. We remember a little band of Pilgrims, forbearers of our own United Church of Christ who risked everything to seek freedom to worship God in spirit and in truth. And this is why we extend freedom and welcome to all who seek to worship and praise God with grateful hearts!

Bruggemann offers this prayer rooted in Psalm 145:

When we sound these ancient cadences, we know ourselves to be at the threshold with all your creatures in heaven and on earth,

everyone from rabbits and parrots to angels and seraphim...alleluia...angels teaching us how to adore you...That is how it is when we praise you.

We join the angels in praise, and we keep our feet in time and place...awed to heaven, rooted in earth.

We are daily stretched between communion with you and our bodied lives, spent but alive, summoned and cherished but stretched between...”(*Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*)

Today our joy overflows. God is good. When? All the time! The stewardship of our time, talents, and money become our psalm, our hymns, our prayers of gratitude. So today we give thanks to God for all that is and will be knowing that we place our trust in God as source of our lives and our church both today and in all the days to come.