

November 7, 2010
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

Psalm 107

Let Us Give Thanks To God

Introduction – Slide #1

Rev. Mark Martin, in speaking to us last Sunday about generosity – about giving – reminded us that generosity is borne out of an attitude of gratitude – a recognition that all things – things great and small – come from God. – Mark challenged us to look around us – to become more aware of the multitudes of God’s blessings that fill our lives.

This is what we will be doing for the next three weeks – nurturing this ‘attitude of gratitude’ – learning to pay attention to what God has done and is doing for us and around us – learning to respond – to the blessings of God – with our words of thanks (yes of course) – but also through the actions of our lives. – See, we will never be generous people – generous with our time, our talent, and our money – until we are thankful people.

Our reading this morning is from the 107th Psalm. It is a Psalm – a song - of Thanksgiving. – **(Slide #2 – responsive words ‘Let them thank...)** Like a song there is a repetitive refrain that drives home the message. Over and over again the refrain is ‘*Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.*’

There is a second refrain throughout this Psalm it is ‘*Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble.*’ -- I am going to ask you to join me in those refrains during the reading.

Let us pray

Slide #3 - Looking back

O give thanks to the Lord for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

‘Time heals all wounds’, we say.

Looking back on a trying time --- a difficult period

Looking back after the test is failed, rebellious teenager is raised, the marriage is over, the surgery is over, the death is grieved.

Looking back after the hurt – the stress – the suffering is past.

Looking back – after the passing of time blunts the rawness of the physical, emotional and spiritual feelings of pain and hurt

We often find ourselves saying, ‘It wasn’t that bad.’

‘It could have been worse.’

‘Not nearly as difficult as ole Suzy or Sam went through.’

It is easy to look back with time easing the hurt of difficult times and be thankful.

It is easy to look back with time easing the sting of loss and see how the hand of God was at work in this way or that.

It is easy to look back with time shortening the distance and know, after the fact, the steadfast love of God.

The Psalmist who wrote the 107th Psalm is looking back – the passage of time erasing – easing the hurt and pain. --- The Psalmist is looking back:

After the trouble had been cleaned up.

After the people who had been scattered in all directions, 100s of miles had come back home.

After the years of wander in desolation was over.

After the hunger and thirst had been satisfied.

After they had been saved from their distress.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

Slide #4 – What about when we're up to our armpits in alligators?

It is easy to give thanks – easy to feel the steadfast love – easy to know that that love endures forever – with the clarity of hindsight and time's healing balm

but what about when you're up to your armpits in alligators?

- What about when you can't see anything good about yourself and wonder if you are loved or if anybody cares.

- Or what about when you can't pay the bills or your job has been lost.

- Or what about when you are puking sick from your cancer treatment or can't get out of your house because of the pain of trying to walk to the car.

- Or what about when grief knocks you down and you can't get your head up off the pillow.

- Or what about when the funds you worked all your life for – the plans you made for your retirement – are all in the tank because of declining interest rates and a failing stock market.

- Or what about when you can no longer keep up with the rising prices of things – gas, food, fuel to heat your home, the medicine and treatments to keep you well.

It is easy to give thanks – easy to feel the steadfast love – easy to know that that love endures forever – with the clarity of hindsight and time's healing balm -- but what about now?

What about now;

When we are living in the midst of global economic crises that promises to reshape our economy and our lives for decades?

What about now;

While we are caught in the quagmire of war - the constant fear of terror?

What about now;

When everywhere we turn it seems that we find increased polarization – we are either conservative or liberal – democrat or republican – pro-life or pro-choice – supporters of traditional marriage or equality for gay and lesbian people – when we are either right or wrong?

What about now;

As we struggle with rising costs and shrinking incomes.

What about now;

As we face the realities of raising families – of illness and aging.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good? – His steadfast love endures forever?

We are living in anxious times! Troubling times! There is no doubt. – Right now we don't have either the benefit of hindsight or the healing ointment of time. – Right now we are in the thick of it. --- So what do we do?

Give into hopelessness?

Give into fear?

Withdraw into our own small worlds? – Hold on to all that we have?

Slide # 5 – Psalm 107 – Called to Remember

There are two things that the Psalm calls us to do when we find ourselves living in anxious times. -- The first is to remember. – While we don't have the benefit of time to distance ourselves from the current situation that we live in we are called to remember how God has provided for others who have lived in anxious times.

“Let those who are wise give heed (pay attention) and consider the steadfast love of the Lord.”

Scripture is filled with stories of how God has been in the midst of people living in anxious times – hearing their cries – answering their prayers - providing for them. – Stories of widows down to their last bean – of parents crying out for help for their children – of people lost in the midst of their own selfishness looking for a new way of life – of nations oppressed crying out for a savior.

As people who are living in anxious times we are called to remember. Remember how God has been at work in our lives providing for us in anxious times. Maybe this has been through the kindness of a teacher who saw more in us than we saw in ourselves.

Or maybe it was in that parent who lent us a little money to get started.

Or maybe it was in the friend who hung in there with us when things were bad.

Or the spouse who wouldn't give up on us.

Or the medicine that made us well.

Or the neighbors who checked on us after our spouse died.

As people who are living in anxious times we are called to remember. So we come to this table once again to remember how God has provided for us and how God provides for us. – Here in this feast we remember how God satisfies us who are thirsty for a world where peace reigns and us who are hungry for a life in which meaning is found in being generous. – Here we feed on the bread and we drink the cup – and we remember how good God is.

Slide #6 – Called to give thanks

Which brings us to the second thing and that is thankfulness. – As we remember what God has done our response is one of thankfulness. In fact the prayer that we say as we prepare to celebrate communion is called the prayer of Great Thanksgiving. – It is a prayer in which we remember what God has done and we give thanks for what God is doing.

Thankfulness is the key for us who are living in anxious times. – Because thanksgiving comes out of remembering and remembering reminds us of how God is present with us now.

Let me ask you this question. What are you thankful for today – just to this point of this day?

- I am thankful for sleep – for a bed – warm. – For the dawn of a new day with all its potential. – I am thankful for coffee – for ability to read. – I am thankful for Cheerios and bread and raspberry jelly. – I am thankful for a loving wife who is surprisingly always glad to see me. – I am thankful for a home to keep warm and dry in. – I am thankful for the gathering here with others to worship.

I mean what if we took as much time to tend to all those things that make for the anxiety that we are living in – what if we took as much time to think and share about the things we are thankful for as we did for listening to the evening news, reading the daily paper, retelling the stories of anxious times with others. --- What if we even took 10 minutes a day just to say thanks to God for a whole list of things that we are thankful for. – What if we did cultivate that attitude of gratitude each and every day taking time to look – to recall – how God has provided for us – and to give thanks.

It is an attitude of gratitude – it is about being people who are always and endlessly thankful – that enables us to be generous. – This morning we dedicate our pledges – the monetary commitments we will offer to support the mission and ministry of this part of God’s church for the coming year. – It is our offering of thanks.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Amen.