

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**

**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • NOVEMBER 18, 2018**

**The Psalm Litany**

Based on Psalm 126

*When we found our lives restored it was like a dream;*

***we could laugh again***

***and find joy in our days and nights.***

*God has done great things in our midst.*

***Those who sow the seeds of mourning***

***will reap the harvest of healing.***

*Let us pray:*

***We wait for the miracle of your harvest,***

***Spirit of life, when your song shall once again***

***be in our mouths. Amen.***

**The Scripture**

I Samuel 2:1-10

*Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory. "There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail. The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed."*

**The Message**  
***Grateful To-gather***  
**Nick Larson**

The brilliant theologian Diana Butler Bass says, “Strange thing about Gratitude – it always comes with a preposition. We are grateful *for* something, grateful *to* someone, and often, grateful *with* others.”

Even in gratitude that isn’t directed and when you think you are by yourself, prepositions show up. Imagine you need to get away, perhaps to struggle with a decision or a grief. One day you wake up and take a long walk into the watershed, forest preserve not too far from your seminary apartment (yes...this is completely fictional why do you ask?). You walk down to the lake’s edge and stand gazing into the still, cool waters. The sun is shining, the birds are chirping, the rays of light are glinting off the pool, breaking into rays of rainbows onto the leaves of the trees that surround you. It is as if, in that very moment, your heart breaks open. You feel immense gratitude *for* the beautiful sunshine, grateful *to* your generous wife for supporting your crazy dream, and grateful *with* the singing blue jays.

Even when you are alone, and there are no other human beings, and you experience gratitude, you are in community. No matter how isolated in those woods, gratitude connects you to creation’s rhythms, to that person who helped you get there, and to the other creatures, and perhaps to God. There, at that deserted lake, gifts are given and received, praise returned, and new awareness about connection is made, so much so that years later I can describe to you that feeling.

When it comes to gratitude, says Diana, “me” always leads to “we.” That is the nugget I want you to walk away with today, that when it comes to gratefulness, it is social. It should take us outside ourselves and shows us the interconnected network of existence and how sustained we are because of and through one another.

Last night, I had the immense joy of celebrating with Hannah Overfelt and Clint Muzzy, who were married right here at Broadway, and I co-celebrated communion in their beautiful wedding, and then we celebrated with them. At the reception, as I was listening to Hilary offer her deep and heartfelt toast to her little sister, I had two thoughts. One: I pray one day my kids are as close as Jeff and Terry’s kids. And Two: gratitude is about relationship. Gratitude, in its purest and best form, comes when you offer something, because you are in relationship.

Family, whether by birth or by choice, is not somehow specifically magical or special because of all the stuff you do *for* each other, but because you are *with* each other. It is the choice of time and energy with another, that forges those bonds of relationship.

Certainly, we think of such gatherings – graduations, weddings, street fairs, harvest celebrations, and holidays, like Thanksgiving – as expressions of happiness (at least most of the time). They are also expressions of a very public kind of gratitude: the public exuberances of thanks, often in response to rites of passage or seasons of life. Graduation is a public ritual for a child growing up and entering adult life. Food -and- wine festivals originated to mark spring planting or the fall gathering in of the crops. Weddings give thanks for a marriage and the beginning of a new family. In a real sense, these events are the theaters of giving thanks.

As long as humans have existed, there have been such festive occasions, these festivals of gratitude. So, it is fitting that on the weekend of Hannah Overfelt's wedding, we look at the Hannah of Scripture, who changed the course of human history during one of these harvest festivals. Hannah, after her husband offered sacrifices at one such harvest festival, and her rival wife (yes, multiple wives) rubbed her failure in her face, she wanted to do something about it.

Hannah was a woman without children, and she longed for that relationship. So, she marched into the temple after that festival and cried inconsolably to God, pouring out her heart and vowing that if God were to grant her request to give her a son, she would set the child apart for a life of holy discipline.

Hannah, at once, embodies both the patriarchal cultural expectations of her worth, and a deep assumption that God is concerned about her. Hannah entered the temple and she “pours out her soul” to God from an interior awareness of her connection to God's concern. She, in that moment, recognizes that cultural need for fulfillment and yet turns the deeper version of it over to God. Hannah's anguish was real, whether it came from her yearning for a child or from the uselessness that she felt in a culture that puts great worth on a woman's fertility. Her prayer of groaning came from a place of utter vulnerability.

And God delivered and blessed her with a son, whom she named Samuel. And then she sang our song of celebration that we read this morning.

Yet, if we aren't careful, and we read/listen to her song – our text this morning – we can get too wrapped up in the birth of this one particular child that we might miss the greater transformation. We can remain in the individual gratitude and miss the communal gratitude.

In her song is a declaration that God has changed her sadness to joy following the turn of events that precedes her prayer of praise. And yet, if we read carefully, we'll notice that this song is about so much more than just her own personal gratitude. It is a

prayer of praise within the larger story of God's faithfulness to Israel for the sake of the world.

As Hannah's prayer grows ever more exuberant, we sense that she is celebrating a deliverance that encompasses not just the birth of her son, but the whole of God's covenant people. Her feeling of gratefulness moves her from 'me' and 'my' stuff towards 'we' and the good of 'us.'

And as you might know, her story is the groundwork of the entire Davidic monarchy, and it finds its roots right here in her story of despair, barrenness and in humble prayer. Her words anticipate the king that Samuel would someday anoint, namely, David, and we even hear echoes of Mary of Nazareth's own song about the coming birth of Christ.

To receive and to give thanks is the story of faith. Receiving, not taking, is the very meaning of our shared humanity, and it is the thread of faith.

This week, many of us, will gather around large and sometimes-difficult family tables, especially given the political and social discourse in our world today. It may not be something you are looking forward to, but all of us can break down walls by reclaiming why we gather in the first place.

Other than providing us with a day or week off work and producing a few civic proclamations, Thanksgiving has largely been pushed to the private domestic arena. Rarely do we see or emphasize the tables of different people gathering together to share in a meal of bounty. Instead, we tend to celebrate in intimate like-minded groups.

Some of this privatization emerged, no doubt, because of a certain awkwardness associated with a holiday - the picture of happy Natives feeding grateful Pilgrims just does not square with the historical record. Nor do the nostalgic Norman Rockwell type images of some happy nuclear family at a table fit with a family patriarch with a large knife ready to carve up some deep brown turkey. That is not what most American families know today.

Besides being privatized, Thanksgiving in America is lost to the consumeristic rush to Christmas; Black Friday, Cyber Monday, or even shopping on Thursday itself. Not so long-ago, stores closed in a grateful pause that allowed shoppers and sellers alike a space to breathe before the December holiday. Now, not so much. You get a couple hours to gobble down the meal with the relatives before you rush off to get holiday discounts. Huge crowds gather not to play or celebrate, but to be the first in line at Walmart. This is not ecstasy of gratitude – it is agony of scarcity.

Instead of giving thanks for abundance, we push to the front of the queue to make sure we got ours, before anyone else beats us to it. Consumer thanksgiving is a zero-sum

game, as advertisers often remind us until supplies last, and something not unlike Hannah's rival wife who used to provoke and irritate Hannah for her barrenness.

But a better thanksgiving is still there, no matter how ignored, privatized, or corrupted it may seem. I once read a survey that said 78 percent of Americans said that they had felt *strongly* thankful in the last week (that's every week). If that survey was right – that 78 percent of us experience gratitude on a regular basis – why not celebrate that?

Gratitude, evidently, is something we share. We might even give thanks for the binding power of giving thanks! Gratefulness is not partisan, exclusive, or even necessarily religious. But it is transforming, and life altering!

Hannah's song proclaims of a day when God will deliver all, and bless all through God's chosen people, where Justice will come for the wicked, where God will turn wrong things right side up, God will judge justly, and deliver the needy and puts down the oppressor, God will uphold the world, and bring down death and make us alive, and bless the barren with the full number of children.

Hannah's voice joins with the prophet Miriam and Mary of Nazareth in praise of Thanksgiving to our God who works deliverance through extraordinary circumstances. "Not by might does one prevail" sings Hannah, for she has personal knowledge of the divine power to work beyond the reach of ordinary human expectations.

Hannah's significance for gospel proclamation is her unabashed dependence and bold trust in God, her glad receptivity and eager responsiveness to God, her ecstatic and eccentric praise for the goodness of God. Hannah summons us to offer all we are and have as a holy and living sacrifice to the One who alone is worthy of such praise.

We can celebrate the bounty of the earth, the gifts of life and work, the pleasure of relationships, the real unity of deliverance, peace and interdependence, and a call to serve others as we have been served.

We can celebrate on Thanksgiving, as a day when we turn history on its head and say that Thanksgiving is not about Colonists taking from Native peoples, but about coming together to gather around tables to express the abundance we have, the abundance of a beautiful land, a land bountiful enough for all, that it is a day marking humility, forgiveness, and appreciation.

That is worth shouting from the rooftops. Heck, that is something worth singing about!