

# Sermon

## O Give Thanks

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, July 31, 2022

Eighth Sunday aft Pentecost

### Prayer of Illumination:

**“Praise God from whom all blessings flow!” we sing.**

**“In grateful devotion our tribute we bring” we sing.**

**And by our singing we signal that we know that you are the source of every gift worth having. Your generosity is not grudging or stingy — it is prodigal, extravagant, even imprudent.**

**So we gather as children of God to hear about your rescue and about our response in gratitude. Teach us this day, Lord, to give thanks for your copious goodness. And for our part we will listen, and watch as the stories of thanksgiving are told — so that we might follow in the ways of the saints before us and offer ourselves in glad thanksgiving. Amen.**

Psa. 107:1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
for his steadfast love endures forever.

2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
those he redeemed from trouble

3 and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.

Psa. 107:4 Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to an inhabited town;

5 hungry and thirsty,

their soul fainted within them.

- 6 Then **they cried to the LORD in their trouble,**  
and he delivered them from their distress;  
7 he led them by a straight way,  
until they reached an inhabited town.  
8 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
9 For he satisfies the thirsty,  
and the hungry he fills with good things.

- Psa. 107:10 Some sat in darkness and in gloom,  
prisoners in misery and in irons,  
11 for they had rebelled against the words of God,  
and spurned the counsel of the Most High.  
12 Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor;  
they fell down, with no one to help.  
13 Then **they cried to the LORD in their trouble,**  
and he saved them from their distress;  
14 he brought them out of darkness and gloom,  
and broke their bonds asunder.  
15 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
16 For he shatters the doors of bronze,  
and cuts in two the bars of iron.

- Psa. 107:17 Some were sick through their sinful ways,  
and because of their iniquities endured affliction;  
18 they loathed any kind of food,  
and they drew near to the gates of death.  
19 Then **they cried to the LORD in their trouble,**  
and he saved them from their distress;  
20 he sent out his word and healed them,  
and delivered them from destruction.  
21 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
22 **And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,**

**and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.**

Psa. 107:23 Some went down to the sea in ships,  
doing business on the mighty waters;  
24 they saw the deeds of the LORD,  
his wondrous works in the deep.  
25 For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,  
which lifted up the waves of the sea.  
26 They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths;  
their courage melted away in their calamity;  
27 they reeled and staggered like drunkards,  
and were at their wits' end.  
28 Then **they cried to the LORD in their trouble,**  
and **he brought them out from their distress;**  
29 **he made the storm be still,**  
and **the waves of the sea were hushed.**  
30 **Then they were glad because they had quiet,**  
and **he brought them to their desired haven.**  
31 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
32 Let them extol him in the congregation of the people,  
and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

Psa. 107:33 He **turns** rivers into a desert,  
springs of water into thirsty ground,  
34 a fruitful land into a salty waste,  
because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.  
35 He **turns** a desert into pools of water,  
a parched land into springs of water.  
36 And there he lets the hungry live,  
and they establish a town to live in;  
37 they sow fields, and plant vineyards,  
and get a fruitful yield.  
38 By his **blessing** they multiply greatly,  
and he does not let their cattle decrease.

Psa. 107:39 When they are diminished and brought low  
through oppression, trouble, and sorrow,  
40 he pours contempt on princes  
and **makes** them wander in trackless wastes;  
41 but he **raises up** the needy out of distress,  
and **makes** their families like flocks.  
42 The upright see it and are glad;  
and all wickedness stops its mouth.  
43 Let those who are wise give heed to these things,  
and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.

- I. I do not typically preach in an expository style . . .**
  - A. But today I am shifting into something closer to a “teaching sermon” than is my norm.**
  - B. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy we find God telling us through Moses that the point of the instructions was that they become a curriculum for faithful living. A sort of course which we teach to each succeeding generation.**
  - C. Some passages of scripture are more easily used in that way.**
    - 1. Psalm 107 is one of them.**
    - 2. It is a mini-course in gratitude and in helping us notice a biblical pattern for thankfulness and giving.**
  - D. I have included the psalm as a handout (and for you at home as an attachment to the bulletin PDF)**
    - 1. You may want to have that handy because I’ll be working closely with the text today.**
  - E. Psalm 107 is highly stylized and follows a pattern, which I believe is a teaching tool about how to give thanks.**

1. I want to help you see the pattern.

## II. “O Give Thanks”

- A. We begin the psalm with an imperative. “Give thanks”
1. Many psalms begin this way.
  2. Some with the vocative too - “O Give thanks *you people of God, or all you nations* for example.
  3. But here, just a generic “Give Thanks.”
- B. Why? (in Hebrew kee “for or because”)
1. The Lord is Good
  2. God’s steadfast love endures forever. (See also Psa 136)
    - a. *Hesed* = “determined, persistent, fidelity in every circumstance.”
  3. Then further exposition:
    - a. Redeemed,
    - b. Redeemed,
    - c. gathered.(all these verbs point to miracles)
- C. So the first to parts of the pattern are:
1. Imperative to “Give Thanks”. followed by
  2. preposition “because” or “for.”

## III. Then the psalm presents 4 case-studies of gratitude:

- A. 4-9 Desert wanderers
- B. 10-16 Prisoners
- C. 17-22 Sick
- D. 23-32 Caught in storm at sea

**IV. Psalm concludes with section recounting God's miraculous rescues**

- A. Here you want to pay attention to the verbs. God:**
  - 1. Turns**
  - 2. turns**
  - 3. blesses**
  - 4. makes**
  - 5. raises up**
  - 6. makes**
- B. Again these all point back to The Lord's fidelity in rescuing Israel from times and places of trouble.**
- C. Now let's go back and look more carefully at the case studies ...**

**V. Four examples are given to illustrate why we give thanks.**

- A. Before I begin, let me mention that you will notice that most of the examples *assume* that if you're in trouble - it's your fault.  
Now, theologically *that is a problem* and even the Jesus disagrees with that assessment sometimes.  
But these examples are given out of a common starting assumption about a morally-coherent universe where good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. We're not going to try to solve that question of theodicy today - but I wanted to mention that, though this psalm tells it one way, the Bible also says that sometimes**

**we are in trouble for reasons that have nothing to do with our own sin.**

**B. Naming the trouble:**

**4 Some wandered in desert wastes,**

finding no way to an inhabited town;

5 hungry and thirsty,

their soul fainted within them.

10 Some sat in darkness and in gloom,

prisoners in misery and in irons,

11 for they had rebelled against the words of God,

and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

12 Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor;

they fell down, with no one to help.

17 Some were sick through their sinful ways,

and because of their iniquities endured affliction;

18 they loathed any kind of food,

and they drew near to the gates of death.

23 Some went down to the sea in ships,

doing business on the mighty waters;

24 they saw the deeds of the LORD,

his wondrous works in the deep.

25 For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,

which lifted up the waves of the sea.

26 They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths;

their courage melted away in their calamity;

27 they reeled and staggered like drunkards,

and were at their wits' end.

**C. The people's response:**

6 Then **they cried to the LORD in their trouble,**

13 Then **they cried to the LORD in their trouble,**

19 Then **they cried to the LORD in their trouble,**

28 Then **they cried to the LORD in their trouble,**

### **D. God's response:**

and he delivered them from their distress;

7 he led them by a straight way,  
until they reached an inhabited town.

he saved them from their distress;

14 he brought them out of darkness and gloom,  
and broke their bonds asunder.

he saved them from their distress;

20 he sent out his word and healed them,  
and delivered them from destruction.

he brought them out from their distress;

29 he made the storm be still,  
and the waves of the sea were hushed.  
30 Then they were glad because they had quiet,  
and he brought them to their desired haven.

### **E. Final imperatives:**

8 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
(this in each case before more detailed descriptions)

**VI. Whenever you study scripture like this, when you find an exception - something different - you sit up and pay attention.**

#### **A. Verse 22**

22 And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,  
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

#### **B. The verb “tell” (in Hebrew *yada*)**

- C. *yada* becomes *todah* — so the “offer thanksgiving sacrifices,” is to:  
“Tell the story of need and rescue,  
&  
Make a gift - a “thank offering.”

VII. So the psalm envisions a pattern of gratitude which sounds a bit like Amazing grace + an offering.

- A. I was lost and now I’m found, I was blind and now I see *therefore* (because I who am *nobody* have been made into somebody through the mercy of the Almighty) *therefore* I express my gratitude with this gift.
- B. Now those of you who were paying attention to last week’s message from Matthew will object, “I thought Jesus said to make your gifts in secret - to not let your right hand know what your left hand was doing!”
- C. And yet, here, in Psalm 107 scripture envisions a public act of giving — what gives?
- D. Here’s the distinction:
1. *If* we give without telling the story of God’s rescue . . . then our giving becomes about our self-sufficiency and a show of *our* strength.
  2. *But if* we follow the pattern of Psalm 107 and *begin* by describing the hour when we were at the edge of coping - only to be rescued by a loving God — then our gift is *not* about our strength and self-sufficiency - it is about God’s grace and *our gratitude*.

- VIII. I suspect that those of us who have lost touch with our vulnerability — who live in the illusion of self-sufficiency — have a very difficult time with generous gratitude.**
- A. In “polite” traditions like Presbyterianism we may also have lost that practice of bearing witness to God’s rescue and thus have lost contact with one of the prime instigators of gratitude.**
  - B. So let me close by showing you what this might look like — a true 5<sup>th</sup> case-study from your pastor’s life.**
    - 1. Clinical depression**
    - 2. much self-loathing which infiltrated even my prayers**
    - 3. Vigils at monastery of the Holy Spirit**
    - 4. A new moment of clarity about grace.**
  - C. My rescue was not an instantaneous relief from the ravages of depression — I had several more years of treatment and prayer before I escaped my time of trial.**
    - 1. But that visitation from the HS which opened my eyes to God’s love for me marked the turning point where I “came to myself” and began the journey back home.**
    - 2. So, I live a generously as I dare. I still struggle to be a generous as I know I should be. But I tell of good’s deeds of rescue with joy and offer my gifts as signs of my gratitude.**

## Conclusion — Prayer of Walter Brueggemann

### We are takers

You are the giver of all good things.

All good things are sent from heaven above,  
rain and sun,  
day and night,  
justice and righteousness,  
bread to the eater and  
seed to the sower,  
peace to the old,  
energy to the young,  
joy to the babes.

We are takers, who take from you,  
day by day, daily bread,  
taking all we need as you supply,  
taking in gratitude and wonder and joy.

And then taking more,  
taking more than we need,  
taking more than you give us,  
taking from our sisters and brothers,  
taking from the poor and the weak,  
taking because we are frightened, and so greedy,  
taking because we are anxious, and so fearful,  
taking because we are driven, and so uncaring.

Give us peace beyond our fear, and so end our greed.  
Give us well-being beyond our anxiety, and so end our fear.  
Give us abundance beyond our drivenness,  
and so end our uncaring.

Turn our taking into giving . . . since we are in your giving image:

Make us giving like you,  
giving gladly and not taking,  
giving in abundance, not taking,  
giving in joy, not taking,  
giving as he gave himself up for us all,  
giving, never taking. Amen.

