

Thanksgiving Eve Service - November 25, 2020
Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota
Many members contributed "thanksgivings"
Text: 1 Corinthians 1:4a

Welcome on this beautiful Thanksgiving Eve to all who are joining in this service. Welcome, whoever you are, wherever you are and whenever you are. I say "whenever you are" to remind us all that we are not the only and eternal inhabitants of this land. Consider the ground beneath your feet, where you stand (or sit, park or imagine standing) tonight. In her written thanksgiving offering, Carole Kinion Copeland reminds us of the old apple tree that stood to the east of the church. This fall, finally, it was cut down to make way for a new water main. She rescued several slices of its wood, and made art from them. Preserved in its hollow center was the shape of a heart - a heart in the heart of the tree. Working the wood, she pondered the farmers who planted the tree and used its apples; she imagined the history its lifelines could tell us of previous days. I hope you'll look for Carole's essay and the rescued wood as a God's art, history preserved now in our narthex. We honor those who tilled this soil before we arrived.

And before this was farmland, the Sisseton Wahpeton peoples of the Dakota nation tended the woods and prairies here, hunting, planting their gardens. They revered the land and all who moved on it and over it; they left this place they loved only regretfully and, sadly, never received compensation. Some of the Sisseton Wahpeton now live on a reservation in South Dakota. We honor their long stewardship of this land, and thank them for the care they lavished upon it.

And still further in distance and more remote in time, we honor, too, the Wampanoag nation, inhabitants of the eastern seaboard before it became New England. They are credited with celebrating, 400 years ago, what we like to think of as the first Thanksgiving. Despite the treaty of peace they signed with settlers, history is more complex than our grade school memories; the Wampanoag were nearly destroyed by the ill treatment of the European newcomers. Some were enslaved, many died of introduced disease. Their land, too, was forcibly taken from them. Yet a remnant of them remain in Massachusetts. Ivy Pillers has offered links to several articles that tell a truer story - thoughtful reading during what is for most of us an unusual holiday season.

We honor the Wampanoag, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota, and other Indigenous nations; we honor the farmers long gone from this land. And now we, for this time, have stewardship. We cannot know who will walk this land 100, or 400 years from now - the land tells its own story. We are shaped by this place and its history, and we shape it by our presence. So again I say, welcome! Welcome, whoever, wherever and whenever you are! I echo Carole in saying, "I'm grateful for this time to grow together." We have come to give thanks, so let us sing! Come, Ye Thankful People, Come!"

One brief verse sums up the thank offerings I received for tonight's service:
"I always thank my God for you." 1 Corinthians 1:4a

What I heard from you, universally, was gratitude for connection. Connection to family and others: human, animal, and divine. Some of your offerings I repeat in full. Some of you will hear your words woven in here and there. Some of you gave me permission to use your names; some

of you contributed anonymously. All of you blessed me with your contributions. I pass the blessings back to you!

Thanks for new ways of connecting with family and friends despite isolation: Amanda Ross said: "This year has made me thankful for facebook to connect with my community of friends and family. I miss seeing them in person but love that we can still connect through electronic means."

Margie Peterson: "I want to say a BIG Thanks to my families, who have stepped up and arranged for me to have a safe winter since at this time I may not make it to a warmer climate destination."

Others said, "I'm thankful for wonderful friends, and a safe, comfortable and happy place to live." "I am grateful to my three sisters for their love, support and caring attitudes throughout the year. I am blessed to have them in my life." "I am thankful for my family, spouse, children and their spouses, grandchildren, siblings and cousins. I am thankful for my home and life in Rochester. I am thankful for my friends. I am most blessed!"

Some gave thanks for our dear friends and companions in the animal world, and for "opportunities to experience God's critters, large and small." They are "love draped in warm fur." Or even soft feathers, or cool scales.

One contributed this story: "I am thankful for the precious blessings of a loving family. My grandson said, "Gram, I need to take a picture of you for my art class." I asked, "Why would you need a picture of me?" He replied, "Because we are supposed to photograph something we can't live without." Out of the mouths of youths, truly. *People* are the things we can't live without.

Knowing that, here is something that will resonate with most of us: "gratitude for memories of that special someone." Just sit with your own memories of a special person for a moment...

Family extends beyond time and place, beyond ties of genetics and friendship. We are bound together in a web of care:

Peggy McCarty wrote: "After much thought, I am thankful for all those health care workers who work extra shifts, cry over those dying, and continue to care for us, in spite of lack of cooperation."

Ron Murray says simply, "I'm grateful for my church family."

One said, "I am thankful for CPC and for all who help to keep it running, Pastor Jan, Stephanie, Glenna, Meg, Judy Kereakos, the choir, and the bell choir and everyone who is part of CPC, and PWW. I am also thankful for the Presbytery and the Anti-racism task force, and for Executive Presbyter Jeff Japinga."

Another: "Thanks to Pastor Jan for all that she's done for Community Presbyterian Church throughout the last year. She cares deeply about the people and the mission of the church" (I hope so. I try!) "We're thankful for her love, prayers and concern. Amen!"

People expressed thanks, too, for spiritual gifts: Many gave thanks in this way: "I am thankful for God, and for God's ever present love; for the gift of Jesus Christ as my Savior."

I think Stacy Kopecky summed it all up in her profound and whimsical offering: "We have so many things to be grateful for - Family, faith, health, jobs, teachers, technology, nature walks, bonfires, curbside pick up at Chick-Fil-A, a year of slowing down. Gratitude helps us see what is there instead of what isn't." I always thank my God for you. Blessings abound!

I'll close with prayers also offered:

Thank you, God, for the alone times in my life. They have forced me to lean in closer to You.
Thank you, God, for the uncertainties I've experienced. They have deepened my trust in You.
Thank You for the times You came through for me when I didn't even know I needed a rescue.
Thank You, God, for those people in my life whom You have called home to be with You. Their absence from this earth keeps my heart longing for heaven.

And thank You, Lord, not only for my eternal salvation, but for the salvation You afford every day of my life as You save me from myself, my foolishness, my own limited insights, and my frailties in light of Your power and strength.
And all the people said, "Amen!"

God of time and eternity, of this day and of all our days, although today the specter of illness shadows our gratitude, and today many dear ones are beyond our arms' reach to hug, we trust that everything that now feels lost will someday be restored. We have faith that one day the circle will be unbroken again. And so, remembering all your goodness in the past, trusting in your promise of goodness still to come, we offer you our gratitude for all that we have today. *We thank you for this day.* In the blessed name of Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Amen