

## For What We Are about to Receive

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

18th Sunday after Pentecost - October 9, 2022

Texts: Isaiah 25:1-5; Psalm 68:4-10, 32-35; Luke 17:11-19

Isaiah 25:1-5

O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm, the noise of aliens like eat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.

Psalm 68:4-10, 32-35

Sing to God, sing praises to the Holy Name;  
lift up a song to the One who rides upon the clouds,  
Whose name is *I AM*. Exult in the strength of the Maker.

**Father of orphans and protector of widows;**

**God gives the desolate a home to live in  
and leads out the prisoners to prosperity,  
but the rebellious live in a parched land.**

O God, when you went out before your people,  
when you marched through the wilderness,  
the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain,  
at your presence, you who ride upon the storm.

**Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad;  
you restored your heritage when it languished;  
your flock found a dwelling in it;**

**in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.**

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord  
O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens;  
Whose voice is mighty, and whose power is in the skies.

Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." Your Word, our Light; your grace, our hope; your love, our life. TBTG



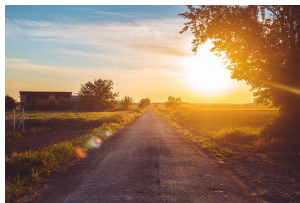
“For what we are about to receive, thank you.” It’s a common table grace, a quick and easy way to say “thank you” before a meal. Maybe it’s best said beforehand because there’s no guarantee you’re going to like what’s for dinner. I mean, what if it’s liver? Or squash? At least there’s something on the table. But this little prayer reminds us of something about gratitude: it’s not just for past gifts. Gratitude is for the present and the future as well.

Yeah, right. I can easily imagine that residents of Puerto Rico, of Cuba, of Florida, hardly had this prayer on their lips or in their hearts as they watched via media Fiona and Ian bearing down on them. More like, “Nooooooooo! Where will it hit? How hard? How much will it hurt?” Who can blame them? I think most of us were praying for people and animals to stay safe, for homes to be spared. And the storms still struck, leaving horrific destruction in their wake. How can we say thank you for this? Where does gratitude come in?



For that, let’s go back to our gospel: ten people approached Jesus, all equally ill, all equally outcast. All equally respectful: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” He sent all of them to the priests, because only priests could pronounce a person contagious or not. All were made clean. All of them had faith that Jesus could fix them. But only to the one who came back to thank him does Jesus say, “Your faith has made you *well*.” Not clean, but well. Whole. We don’t know what happened to him after that, but he wasn’t just saying thanks for what had happened, but for what he was about to receive—a new life, changed in unimaginable ways. All were cured. This one was healed.

Jesus often tells people their faith has made them well. We get this wrong a lot. The fake gospel goes around that if we pray hard enough, we’ll be fixed. This leaves a lot of people doubting themselves or hating God when it seems their prayers aren’t answered. Wellness, wholeness, and healing are not about altering the future but about receiving whatever *is* with gratitude. Ian and Fiona, droughts and floods, hit indiscriminately, Christians and Hindus and atheists. Cancer and Alzheimer’s don’t target people who forgot to say their prayers.



Rainfall and sunshine don’t stop at imaginary human borders because God likes the people on one side more than the other side. This may come as a shock to a lot of Americans who think our country is rich and powerful because God loves us best, and thank God for that favoritism every day. That’s not gratitude, it’s ego. It’s not faith, it’s hubris, soul-killing pride. Also known as entitlement.

Gratitude begins where entitlement leaves off.

Gratitude is not a feeling; it’s a practice.

First be grateful, then see what you receive.

I can think of no better example of this than the one Jane Burgstaler shared with us during Lent, about her response to the news that she had breast cancer. Returning home from that appointment, she stepped out of her car, looked up at the trees and the sky and was struck by the beauty of it all, and felt overwhelmed by gratitude for all of it, for all that came before, and even for all that was to come - even the unknown future. When I asked her permission to repeat this story, she graciously agreed and added, "I am still so very grateful and so very blessed." Yes, she is cancer-free; but it seems to me her spirit was healed in some significant way before she ever started treatment. Her blessing blesses her family, blesses us, her family of faith.

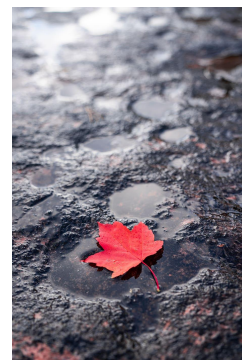


Life has a way of knocking holes in our certainties about ourselves, about the world, about God. The Bible—which is a record of how people experienced themselves, and the world and God—tells us over and over that God is the one who rides the storm. That even in the chaotic events that feel so destructive, God is present, loving and healing. Covid, climate change, economic calamity, conflicts—all expose the imbalance, the unfairness, the cruelty of the way things are. Human cruelty is the cause of suffering, and so is our own callousness in the way we have benefited from the inequities. We can be grateful, not for what we have to hoard, but for what we get to give. Grateful, not for all we have to protect, but what we have to share for the health of our souls and the good of our neighbors.

Friends, I confess that when I look at the state of the world, my mind does not go instantly to gratitude. I'm more likely to let myself be weighed down with fear, dread, and pessimism. The future, frankly, looks shaky. But I have it on good authority from more than one source that gratitude helps in healing depression and any number of physical ills.

The more you practice gratitude for the little things  
the more you experience life as an unexpected gift.

Not just for the gift of what is, but for what will be: can you stop and give thanks? Set aside the grim and the gray for one minute and give thanks for this autumn tree; or if you can't do that much, then be grateful for this one red leaf. Give thanks for this quiet hour together; or if that's too hard, then give thanks for the next breath you take. Each one is a gift. Each one is pregnant with God's healing, a love note from God.



Keep this prayer always in your heart:  
"For what I am about to receive, thank you."

Take just a few minutes and give thanks for each breath you receive.

## Gratitude

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## Prayers

O Christ the same through all our story's pages, our loves and hopes, our failures and our fears;  
Eternal Lord, the king of all the ages, unchanging still amid the passing years.

O living Word, the source of all creation, who spread the skies and set the stars ablaze;  
O Christ the same, who wrought our whole salvation, we bring our thanks for all our yesterdays.

O Christ the same, the friend of sinners, sharing our inmost thoughts, the secrets none can hide;  
Still as of old, upon your body bearing the marks of love in triumph glorified.

O son of man, who stooped for us from heaven—O prince of life, in all your saving power;  
O Christ the same, to whom our hearts are given, we bring our thanks for this our present hour.

O Christ the same, secure within whose keeping our lives and loves, our days and years remain;  
Our work and rest, our waking and our sleeping, our calm and storm, our pleasure and our pain.

O Lord of love, for all our joys and sorrows, for all our hopes when earth shall fade and flee;  
O Christ the same, beyond our brief tomorrows, we bring our thanks for all that is to be.

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Garnaas-Holmes, *Unfolding Light*.