

Sermon followed by Service

Thanksgiving 2023

Psalm 118:1

So has 2023 been a good year or a bad year? A year that has you smiling or a year that has you sighing? Let me tell you what Lisa would tell me: “Now, Kevin, does it really have to be either- or?” No, it doesn’t. 2023 doesn’t have to be either-or - either a good year or a bad year, either a year of smiles or a year of sighs. 2023 can be both a good year and a bad year, both a year of smiles and a year of sighs. That sounds about right, doesn’t it? So what do we do with a both-and year, a both-and life? You can do what I’ve been doing the last couple weeks - you can go crazy. I don’t recommend it. Or you can do what Jesus says: “take one day at a time.” That way, on a bad day, you don’t carry too much trouble at one time, and you can see the light at the end of the trouble. And on a good day, when you take one day at a time, then what? We stay in the good day. Easier said than done, isn’t it? What so often happens?

You’re on top of the world. Things couldn’t be any better. What do you think and do? “Thank you, Lord!”

Then instead of taking one day at a time, tomorrow or next week or next year or who knows when comes into the picture. A darkness clouds over you, an unsettling edginess settles into your bones. Something bad is going to happen. Your “on top of the world” wow is getting queasy in the gut. Instead of feeling on top of the world, full of gratitude, free and generous, you feel tight and edgy, hedged-in, clipped-back, dark and queasy. Instead of thinking: “Thank you, Lord!” soon you’re thinking: “Now what, God? Now what’s going to go wrong?”

So, you’re on top of the world. Is something bad going to happen? Yes! Maybe today; maybe not today but in 2048. So what do we do? That darkness, that queasiness that something bad is going to happen, I could say: “Ignore it!” but I won’t. Instead, I’ll say: embrace it! Embrace it as part of God’s way in this world. Some blessings are here today and gone tomorrow. Some blessings are only for a day, a year, a life-time. Every thing in this world, every one in this world is only for a time. Everything in this world, every one in this world has an expiration date.

There’s sadness there, isn’t there? So why would I want to embrace it? Some people embrace that sadness, the thought of hardship ... they embrace it as an anchor that pulls them down into a hopeless darkness. That doesn’t have to be us! No, we don’t embrace trouble as an anchor to sink us. No, we embrace trouble as a tether to keep us grounded, tied in with Jesus. We embrace the coming hard times because, as Luke tells us: **“We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God.”** Like Paul, we embrace our hardship as a blessing. Paul tells us how he prayed and prayed and prayed

to be delivered, to be given some relief from his thorn in the flesh, only to have God answer: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** I don’t know about you, but to me that sounds like bad news; disappointing, frustrating news. But what did Paul do? He embraced that hardship as a blessing: **“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”**

I’m not saying this is easy; I’m not saying that I’ve mastered this. NO! But when we’re on top of the world, and we feel that dark cloud over our head, that queasiness in our gut that something is about to go wrong, what do we do? We take it and we tie it together with God’s promise - **“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”** We take whatever trouble we have coming and we tie it together with God’s plan - **“you know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”** We take whatever trouble this world throws at us and we tie it together with God’s promise - **“there is nothing in all creation that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”**

And then what? That fear, that worry that wants to spoil our thanksgiving ... it’s tied up in God’s promise! It’s tied up in God’s plan! It’s tied up in God’s future. That’s means - no matter what might come tomorrow, we are free today, free to thank God!

We are free to thank God for the blessings of today, even if they will be gone tomorrow. We are free to thank God for the open space, the breathing space he gives us today, even if it’s only for a day. Yes, we thank God even knowing that some blessings, most blessings, come with expiration dates. But just because they have expiration dates doesn’t mean that we can’t enjoy them while we have them. And just because they have expiration dates doesn’t mean that we don’t thank God for them. No, we thank God for his blessings while we have them. And then when they’re gone, we thank him all over again for the time we had them.

Knowing that most of God’s blessings come with expiration dates can test our trust and thanksgiving. But not all of God’s blessings come with expiration dates. You know the first verse of Psalm 118 - **“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good and his mercy endures forever.”** You know the last verse of Psalm 118 - **“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good and his mercy endures forever.”** You know the first verses of Psalm 106 and 107. Let’s say it together: **“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for he is good and his mercy endures forever.”** That’s right, with Jesus, God’s love for you is forever.

Sometimes it might seem that God's love comes with an expiration date. We might have some guilt from our past that seems to go on forever. It haunts us when things go wrong; it haunts us when things go right because we figure sooner or later things will go wrong. It seems it just won't go away. That's right; on it's own, guilt doesn't go away; it doesn't have an expiration date. But you don't have to be alone with your guilt. Jesus took your sin away; even that sin that might be haunting you - he took that sin away. He took it to the cross and paid for it once and for all. Before God, with Jesus, that charge against you is canceled, done, finished. What stands true today, what stands for you today is God's unbreakable contract - **"I will be your God and you will be my people. I will forgive your sin and remember your transgressions no longer."**

With that unbreakable contract, you have God's unbreakable promise. I know it doesn't always feel that way, but Jesus doesn't promise - "you will feel me with you." Jesus promises: "I will be with you." Jesus doesn't promise you will always feel safe. He promises that as your Good Shepherd he will keep you safe. With David, we get to be sure: **"Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."**

So what do we say? It don't matter whether we're on top of the world or feeling a bit on edge, "when is it going to end?" It doesn't matter whether 2023 has us smiling or sighing. With Jesus, we know that whatever goes wrong will end right. That's why with Jesus we get to say: **"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy endures forever!"** Amen.

THANKSGIVING

2023

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we might wonder: "Has 2023 been a *good* year or a *bad* year? Has 2023 been a year that has you smiling and cheering or a year that has you feeling down and dark?"

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we are reminded of reasons to give thanks even if 2023 has us feeling down and dark, even if many (or most) of the blessings around us come with an expiration date. Why? "For his mercy endures forever!"

OPENING HYMN

"Let All Things Now Living"
Hymn 507

Let all things now living a song of thanksgiving
to God the Creator triumphantly raise, who fashioned and made us,
protected and stayed us, who still guides us on to the end of our days.
God's banners are o'er us; his light goes before us,
a pillar of fire shining forth in the night, till shadows have vanished
and darkness is banished, as forward we travel from light into light.

His law he enforces; the stars in their courses
and sun in its orbit obediently shine. The hills and the mountains,
the rivers and fountains, the deeps of the ocean proclaim him divine.
We, too, should be voicing our love and rejoicing.
With glad adoration a song let us raise till all things now living unite in thanksgiving:
"To God in the highest, hosanna and praise!"

GOSPEL LESSON

Luke 17:11-19

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

When he saw them he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him - and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

CONFESSION OF OUR SIN

(When God acts to deliver us and life gets better, it can be easy to join the nine in forgetting to give thanks. Happiness with blessing is no excuse for thanklessness. We confess ...)

P: O holy and merciful Father, you are the giver of all good things
for this life and forever.

C: **We confess that we are unworthy of your love and blessing.**

P: On the hard days we forget your goodness.

C: **On the good days we forget *you* are the source of all good things.**

P: We focus on your blessings for this world.

C: **and overlook your greatest blessing for eternity.**

P: We focus on the gifts you give *to* us

C: **and overlook the gifts you want to give *through* us.**

P: You give us family and friends to bless us and encourage us,

C: **but we have frustrated your love with thanklessness.**

P: You give us family and friends so we can bless them and encourage them

C: **but we have frustrated your love by discouraging them.**

P: Father, we don't deserve your love and blessing;

C: **but we appeal to your unfailing mercy and ask you to forgive us for Jesus' sake.**

HYMN

"Forgive Us, Lord, for Shallow Thankfulness"

Hymn 754

Forgive us, Lord, for shallow thankfulness,
for dull content with warmth and sheltered care,
for songs of praise for worldly wealthiness, while of your richer gifts we're unaware:

Teach us to thank you, Lord, for love and grace, for life and vision, for a purpose clear,
for Christ, your Son, and for each human face
that shows your message ever new and near.

Forgive us, Lord, for selfish thanks and praise,
for words that speak at variance with deeds;
forgive our thanks for walking pleasant ways, unmindful of a broken brother's needs:

Teach us, O Lord, true thankfulness divine,
that gives as Christ gave, never counting cost,
that knows no barrier of “yours” and “mine,” assured that only what’s withheld is lost.

Forgive us, Lord, for feast that knows not fast,
for joy in things that meanwhile starve the soul,
for walls and wars that hide your mercies vast and blur our vision of the kingdom goal:

Open our eyes to see your love’s intent,
to know with mind and heart its depth and height;
let thankful days in loving labor spent reflect the truly Christlike life and light.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF GOD’S GRACE

P: O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! He does not treat us as our sins deserve. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us. In the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus, you are forgiven. In the plan and promise of our God, you are his children; he will bless you and take care of you; he will make all things work so that goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

THANK GOD, EVEN WHEN ...

LESSON

Philippians 4:4-13, 19, 20

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

HYMN

“Day by Day”

Hymn 803

Day by day, your mercies, Lord, attend me, bringing comfort to my anxious soul.
Day by day, the blessings, Lord, you send me draw me nearer to my heav’nly goal.
Love divine, beyond all mortal measure, brings to naught the burdens of my quest;
Savior, lead me to the home I treasure, where at last I’ll find eternal rest.

Day by day, I know you will provide me strength to serve and wisdom to obey;
I will seek your loving will to guide me o’er the paths I struggle day by day.
I will fear no evil of the morrow, I will trust in your enduring grace.
Savior, help me bear life’s pain and sorrow till in glory I behold your face.

Oh, what joy to know that you are near me when my burdens grow too great to bear;
oh, what joy to know that you will hear me when I come, O Lord, to you in prayer.
Day by day, no matter what betide me, you will hold me ever in your hand.
Savior, with your presence here to guide me, I will reach at last the promised land.

THANK GOD FOR HIS BETTER GIFTS

LESSON

2 Samuel 7:18-22

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said:

“Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?
And as if this were not enough in your sight, Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken
about the future of the house of your servant—and this decree, Sovereign LORD, is for a
mere human!

“What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, Sovereign LORD. For the
sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made
it known to your servant.

“How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but
you, as we have heard with our own ears.”

HYMN

"I Leave All Things to God's Direction"

Hymn 799

I leave all things to God's direction; he loves me both in joy and woe.
His will is good, sure his affection; his tender love is true, I know.
My fortress and my rock is he: what pleases God, that pleases me.

God knows what must be done to save me; his love for me will never cease.
Upon his hands he did engrave me with purest gold of loving grace.
His will supreme must ever be: what pleases God, that pleases me.

God gives me help in all temptation, his loving goal my soul to save.
Calm in the face of life's frustration, all earthly trouble I will brave.
His will be done eternally: what pleases God, that pleases me.

My God has all things in his keeping; he is my ever-faithful friend.
He gives me laughter after weeping, and all his ways in blessings end.
His love endures eternally: what pleases God, that pleases me.

BLESSED TO BLESS!

LESSON

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:

*"They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever."*

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

HYMN

"For the Fruits of His Creation"

Hymn 506

For the fruits of his creation, thanks be to God.
For his gifts to ev'ry nation, thanks be to God.
For the plowing, sowing, reaping, silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safekeeping, thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labor, God's will is done.
In the help we give our neighbor, God's will is done.
In our worldwide task of caring for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God.
For the good we all inherit, thanks be to God.
For the wonders that astound us, for the truths that still confound us,
most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.

SERMON

Psalm 103

OFFERING

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OFFERING HYMN

"We Praise You, O God, Our Redeemer"
Hymn 609

We praise you, O God, our Redeemer, Creator;
in grateful devotion our tribute we bring.
We lay it before you, we kneel and adore you;
we bless your holy name, glad praises we sing.

We worship you, God of our fathers, we bless you;
through trial and tempest our guide you have been.
When perils o'ertake us, you will not forsake us,
and with your help, O Lord, our battles we win.

With voices united our praises we offer and gladly our songs of thanksgiving we raise.
With you, Lord, beside us, your strong arm will guide us;
to you, our great Redeemer, forever be praise!

LITANY OF THANKSGIVING

P: Give thanks to the Lord who is good.

C: **God's love is everlasting.**

P: Come, let us praise God joyfully.

C: **Let us come to God with thanksgiving.**

P: For the good world; for things great and small, beautiful and awesome;
for seen and unseen splendors:

C: **We thank you, O God.**

P: For human life; for talking and moving and thinking together;
for common hopes and hardships shared from birth until our dying:

C: **We thank you, O God.**

P: For work to do and strength to work; for the comradeship of labor;
for exchanges of good humor and encouragement:

C: **We thank you, O God.**

P: For marriage; for the mystery and joy of flesh made one;
for mutual forgiveness and burdens shared; for secrets kept in love:

C: **We thank you, O God.**

P: For family; for living together and eating together; for family amusements and family pleasures:

C: **We thank you, O God.**

P: For children; for their energy and curiosity; for their brave play and startling frankness;
for their sudden sympathies:

C: **We thank you, O God.**

P: For the young; for their high hopes; for their candid criticism;
for their search for freedom:

C: **We thank you, O God.**

P: For growing up and growing old; for wisdom deepened by experience;
for rest in leisure; for time made precious by its passing:

C: **We thank you, O God.**

P: For your help in times of doubt and sorrow; for healing our diseases;
for preserving us in temptation and danger:

C: **We thank you, O God.**

P: For the Church into which we have been called; for the good news we receive by Word
and sacrament; for our life together in the Lord:

C: **We praise you, O God.**

P: For your Holy Spirit, who guides our steps and brings us gifts of faith and love, who
prays in us and prompts our grateful worship:

C: **We praise you, O God.**

P: Above all, O God, for your Son, Jesus Christ, who lived and died and lives again for our salvation; for our hope in him; and for the joy of serving him:

C: **We thank and praise you, eternal God, for all your goodness to us.**

P: Give thanks to the Lord, who is good.

C: **God's love is everlasting.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

P: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

C: **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"Now Thank We All Our God"

Hymn 597

Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love and still is ours today.

Oh, may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
with ever-joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us
and keep us in his grace and guide us when perplexed
and free us from all ills in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,
the Son, and him who reigns with them in highest heaven,
the one eternal God, whom earth and heav'n adore;
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

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