



THANKSGIVING WORSHIP

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NRSV)

By the Rev. Dr. Jessie Fubara-Manuel

Greetings

Grace, love, joy and peace to this gathering in the name of the triune God, Amen.

Call to Worship (adapted from Psalm 100):

One: Come let us shout for joy to the Lord.

All: **Lord, you are worthy of our gladsome worship.**

One: Come, let us enter God's presence with singing.

All: **Lord, you are God, Creator, and keeper of all.**

One: Come, let us enter God's gates with thanksgiving, and God's courts with praise.

All: **Lord, You are good, your love endures forever, your faithfulness continues through all generations.**

Let us bring our thanks and praise, Alleluia!

Hymn: #377 – Come, children join to sing

Opening Prayer:

Everlasting God, you are worthy of all honour and acclamation,
For you are great and mighty, all good, all powerful, all loving, all
merciful. You are the creator of everything that is and has been and shall
be, sovereign over space and time.

Forgive us when we fail to appreciate your greatness; when we worry as
though you are no longer in charge of your world. Forgive us when we
sin against you and fall short of your expectations of us, especially
actions which we now confess in silence (pause). Have mercy, O God
and renew us through your Holy Spirit. Cleanse us through the love of
Christ and put a new heart and a right spirit within us.

Be with us in this time of worship. Enable us to offer to you new songs of
thanksgiving and praise that are pleasing to you. May our fellowship be
with you and with one another, in the name of our Lord and Saviour
Jesus Christ, who taught the disciples to pray, by saying:
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 sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NRSV)

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all
circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Psalm 107:1-8

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.^[a]
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.

Hymn: #802 – For the fruits of all creation

Reflection: Give Thanks!

I will start this Reflection with a poem I wrote long ago in 2004 on the anniversary of my husband's 40th birthday. I entitled it, 'Thankful.'

I feel happy today,
 Joy swelling in my stomach.
 Smiling all by myself.
 Thankful for the gift of the day.

I hear music
 More from my soul
 Songs of gratitude
 For God's many gifts
 My heart in quick beats
 Remembering scores of good
 Brought on by grace and love
 So blessed and happy.

I close my eyes
 Shaking my head
 To thoughts of bliss
 To thoughts of joy
 My mind is counting
 One after the other
 An endless list
 Of God's blessings
 Not my works
 Not my right
 All is of grace
 Grace undeserved.

I am blessed
 I am thankful
 Everywhere I turn
 God is there
 What can I say?
 How do I say it?
 God chose me for love

And I am glad.
 Nothing in return
 Nothing will do
 For gifts so awesome and eternal
 Only thanks will pass.

It is easy to write such a positive poem when everything looks perfect and there are reasons for rejoicing. But what kind of poem would we write when things are not so good; when there is pain, grief, illness, or loss. What happens when our lives are nothing like what we hoped for or even prayed for? I believe these are some of the circumstances for which Paul's admonition, found in our New Testament lesson, comes in handy. In this thanksgiving season, let us reflect on the implications of thanking God, not just **for** good things, but **in** all circumstances.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to 'give thanks in all circumstances.' This must not have been an easy thing for Paul to say. After a very dramatic conversion, Paul became a refugee-evangelist, running from persecutions, mob attacks, and arrests, while suffering untold illnesses. In Acts 17:1-10, his missionary visit to Thessalonica ended abruptly after a riot, in which he was accused of treason, erupted in the streets. He had to escape by night to Berea. Following from this visit, here in our text, Paul writes to the Thessalonians, urging them to be prayerful, to rejoice, and to give thanks in every situation, good or bad. Earlier chapters reveal Paul's concern that the Thessalonian Christians might fall away from the Christian faith due to the difficulties and oppositions that they were facing. He probably guessed that it would be hard to list, at that time, things to be thankful for, so he asks them to cultivate a grateful attitude to God despite their challenges and trials. This state of thankfulness, according to Paul, must draw on trust in the all-knowing God, in whose loving hands are the times and seasons.

As I write this in Edinburgh, Scotland, we just had the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations. There was a service of thanksgiving at the famous St. Paul's Cathedral, London. All over the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, many people joined in this time of joy and happiness. We watched the parades and concerts on large screens with broad smiles. But, while I was thanking God for the Queen and her 70 years of remarkable reign, my heart was sad, for in my home country, Nigeria, my brothers and sisters were being macheted and killed by yet to be identified persons in Owo. Reeling from the shock of such a horrific occurrence, many Nigerian Christians began posting the name, JESUS, on the social media. We were making a statement that Jesus

is not absent in our pain and for that we were thankful. The tension between thanking God for an event or circumstance and thanking God in any event or circumstance is a present reality for many. Perhaps, you could think of times in your life in which you were faced with the dilemma of thanking God in a particular setting. Thanking God is an intentional choice. It is a choice to look through any situation until we see God, actively in control and sovereign over all of time.

The Psalmist in our Old Testament lesson, Psalm 107, helps us in this dilemma. For the Psalmist, we are called to thank God for who God is – God is a good God who loves eternally and unfailingly. God is redeemer, deliverer, and a constant companion. The hymn writer refers to God as the one who ‘moves in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform’. We can trust that the mysterious hand of God is at work in everything that happens to us. God is faithful to ensure that, through (and with) everything and anything, God will hold our hands and lead us to that which is according to his divine purpose. We can give thanks that God will walk alongside us; God will bring people (family, friends, perhaps even total strangers) to walk alongside us. In Philippians 4:6, Paul tells the Philippians a similar thing, ‘Rejoice ... do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.’

Thanksgiving is the grateful confidence that our temporary conditions will lead to a glorious deliverance in Christ Jesus. Thanksgiving is also a deliberate acknowledgement that God has done great things for us, on account of which we are glad. We are thankful because we know and trust that God is good, and that amid everything, God will triumph. God is aware of all things everywhere. Every situation is within God’s sovereign will and none beyond the possibility of God’s workings for his glory and our good. So, when our hearts do not feel like rejoicing or thanking God, when we want to scream at senseless injustices in the world or the pain in our hearts, let us remember, we have a God who is good, who is sovereign and who is able to do all things well.

It is important that we are careful to rejoice, and to dance, where possible, for the glorious acts of wonder that God does daily. Let us marvel at the wonder of creation, at the changing seasons and animal life; and let us thank God the maker of heaven and earth, who is almighty and to whom nothing and no one can be compared. ‘Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.’ May this be our song this season and always. Amen.

Short song:

(A short song or music to enable a reflection on the sermon – this is optional)

“Jesus, name above all names, beautiful Saviour, glorious Lord; Emmanuel, God is with us, blessed Redeemer, living Word.”

Responsive Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

One: Almighty God, we give thanks for the gift of Jesus Christ, Saviour, Redeemer, King.

All: Lord, receive our thanks.

One: We give thanks for one another, for the gift of fellowship and sisterhood in the Women’s Missionary Society.

All: Lord, receive our thanks.

One: We give thanks for those who first settled here in this land and founded this community.

All: Lord, receive our thanks.

One: We give thanks for our partners and sisters scattered all over the world.

All: Lord, receive our thanks.

One: We give thanks for the gift of life, for happy moments, for celebrations, for families.

All: Lord, receive our thanks.

One: We give thanks within the realities of our lives today.

All: Lord, grant us grace.

One: We give thanks in the situations we face, challenges to confront, and difficult decisions we must make.

All: Lord, grant us grace.

One: We give thanks in systems of injustice, economic inequalities, and political instabilities around the world.

All: Lord, grant us grace.

One: We pray for all who love you and strive to love you more, sisters and brothers in Christ in the Presbyterian Church in Canada and in our worldwide fellowship.

All: Lord, hear our prayers.

One: We pray for your own creation – animals and plants, seasons, and days

All: Lord, hear our prayers.

One: Lord, God, we thank you that you have made your home among us. Make us ever mindful of who you are, of your ever-abiding presence and to be ever thankful for your goodness in all circumstances of life.

All: Lord, hear our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen and Amen.

Offering Prayer:

Almighty God, please accept the offerings that we bring to you today. Teach us, Lord, to offer not just our money, but also our hearts, our talents, our service, our time, our all, and to do so in thanksgiving, as your faithful witnesses. We dedicate our offerings and ourselves in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Hymn: #457 – Now thank we all our God

Blessing: (All)

Send us out, Lord,
Rejoicing in your love
Renewed by your grace
Challenged by your word
And inspired by your sacrifice.
Equip us to speak of you
Point to you
Work for you
Live through you
Celebrate your blessings
And give thanks to you.
Amen

Alternative Activity:

This may be used where there is room for discussion or an activity engaging with thanksgiving to God. You can have break-out rooms, if online or small group discussions if in person.

- 1) Discuss what you are thankful for: happy times, achievements, milestones, etc.
- 2) Discuss circumstances in which you are thankful: difficult times, challenging times, loss, grief, violence, pain, etc.
- 3) When did you most feel God's presence?

Alternative Responsive Psalm (Adapted from Psalm 136:1-6):

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of lords.

His love endures forever.

To him who alone does great wonders,

His love endures forever.

Who by his understanding made the heavens.

His love endures forever.

Who spread out the earth upon the waters,

His love endures forever.

Let us worship God

Note 1:

In all responsive readings and prayers, worship leader is regular font and congregation is in bold font.

Note 2:

The Rev. Dr. Jessie Fubara-Manuel, PhD, is a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and Associate Minister of South Leith Parish, Church of Scotland. She is the Secretary of Tumekutana (Presbyterian/Reformed African Women Gathering).