



**Worship Service Theme: Gratitude
(Sunday before Thanksgiving)**

Helpful elements:

Green table covering (Ordinary Time)

Welcome: Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is ____ and I'll be leading our worship time today. This week in the U.S. we'll be celebrating Thanksgiving, so it's a particularly good time to talk about **gratitude** and giving thanks for our blessings.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence joyfully and reverently, and let us depart today with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace which passes all understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd," together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Suggested Hymns:

For the Beauty of the Earth

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Amazing Grace

First reading: Psalm 100. This is called “a Psalm for giving thanks.”

¹ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

² Serve the Lord with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

³ Know that the Lord, he is God!

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ Enter the Lord’s gates with thanksgiving,

and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to the Lord; bless his name!

⁵ For the Lord is good;

his steadfast love endures forever,

and his faithfulness to all generations.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:

Holy, Holy, Holy

Jesus Loves Me

Second reading: The History of Thanksgiving¹

One of our U.S. presidents established Thanksgiving as a national holiday many years ago. I wonder if anyone knows which president that was? *[allow guesses]*

It was Abraham Lincoln, right in the middle of the Civil War. In October 1863, Abraham Lincoln decided to proclaim a day of Thanksgiving, and in his official proclamation, this is what Lincoln wrote:

¹ <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=69900>

“It has seemed to me fit and proper that [God’s gracious gifts] should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States ... to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November ... as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwells in the heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up [thanks to God for] blessings they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil [war], and [beg] the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it.”

Suggested Hymns:

Softy and Tenderly

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

Interactive Homily: Let’s talk a bit more about gratitude and thanksgiving.

- What do you think gratitude is? Think about how you feel when you feel grateful: What “posture” of the heart does gratitude take?
 - Joy, thankfulness
 - Humility too! We feel humbly grateful because we’ve received a *gift*, not something we earned or necessarily deserve.
- Why is the fall season a particularly good time for giving thanks, especially if you’re a farmer?
 - Harvest! Thanksgiving feasts celebrate an abundance of blessings – rain, sunshine, healthy crops for food – that you could not have made happen on your own.
- *[optional:]* When Abraham Lincoln declared a national day of Thanksgiving right in the middle of the Civil War, what do you think he was trying to accomplish?
 - In the middle of war, being grateful could bring people together – to repent of sin (slavery) and arrogance, to turn people’s eyes off of themselves and their anger, and to turn toward God for forgiveness and guidance.
- When you think of all the things that have happened in your life, what are the things you are most thankful for?

- Friends; family; work; caregivers; pets; parents (*encourage people to name blessings*)
- Have you ever been eventually thankful for something that was hard at first?
 - Moving to a new place: feelings of change and uncertainty, but then the blessing of making new friends
 - Aging! It's hard, with aches and pains and losses ... but we gain experience and wisdom and perspective on what really matters
 - Example from the Civil War: obviously this was a terribly hard period in U.S. history. But what did it accomplish?
 - The abolition of slavery
- Let's think about the Bible. What do you think is probably the most striking example of a hard thing that turned out to be an incredible, beautiful thing?
 - Jesus' death. A truly awful event, Jesus' suffering and crucifixion, ended with Jesus' resurrection and victory over death, ensuring our reconciliation with God.
- I can say that I am so very thankful for each and everyone one of you: for your wisdom, your life experience, your long faithfulness, your openness to me and to each other, your patience and joy even in the midst of transition and change and sometimes hardship.

... Let's take a moment to silently pray in thankfulness for God's many blessings, and to ask God to bring to mind someone to whom we could say "thank you" today as a practice of gratitude.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

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, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Suggested Hymns:

**This is My Father's World
It is Well with My Soul**

Standing on the Promises

Third Reading: *Gratitude*, from Spiritual Literacy by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat²

The medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart suggests that if the only prayer we say in our lifetime is “thank you,” it would suffice.

Yes, and why not every day! Let’s put a song of praise on our lips in the early morning. For the breath that fills our lungs and for our unique bodies. For loved ones, family, and friends. “Praise God,” says the teacher Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. “It puts everything into its proper place and perspective.” Gratitude rejoices with her sister joy and is always ready to light the candles and have a party.

Let’s endorse British writer G. K. Chesterton’s idea of “taking things with gratitude and not taking things for granted.”

Suggested Hymns:

**Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing
Shall We Gather at the River**

Fourth Reading: “The Good News” by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk

They don’t publish
the good news.

The good news is published
by us.

We have a special edition every moment,
and we need you to read it.

The good news is that you are alive,
that the linden tree is still there,
standing firm in the harsh winter.

The good news is that you have wonderful eyes
to touch the blue sky.

The good news is that your child is there before you,
and your arms are available:
hugging is possible.

² adapted; p. 184-185

They only print what is wrong.
Look at each of our special editions.
We always offer the things that are not wrong.
We want you to benefit from them
and help protect them.
The dandelion is there by the sidewalk,
smiling its wondrous smile,
singing the song of eternity.
Listen. You have ears that can hear it.
Bow your head.
Listen to it.
Leave behind the world of sorrow,
of preoccupation,
and get free.
The latest good news
is that you can do it.

Suggested Hymns:

Blest Be the Tie that Binds

I Need Thee Every Hour

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word “Lord”)

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology (Reprise)

Extra material:

Ephesians 1:15-18

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the

hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

“A Thanksgiving Prayer,” by Rusty Smith Carnarius

Encircled by Thy love we stand
And pass our love from hand through hand
All those who must be far apart
Link with us here in thought and heart
For just one moment, see each face
Each dear uniqueness touched by grace
Give thanks for food and those we’re seeing
And most of all, give thanks for being.