

Let Us Pray Together. Thanks Be to God!

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

Let us pray: Gracious one of many names, speak to us in the words that we hear and through the people you have set on our path. We give you thanks that we are able to be together in this space and online today. Amen.

The title of my message today is “Let us pray together: Thanks be to God!”

When you hear me say these words, “*Let us pray together,*” please join me in responding “Thanks be to God!” **Try it now: Let us pray together: Thanks be to God.** (Perfect!)

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor, and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me “to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness...

*Now, therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the **Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be.** That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks...*

These are words that were spoken by George Washington, on the third day of October, in the year 1789. He had just become the first President of the United States in April that year.

**We have come together today anticipating the celebration of the 233rd Thanksgiving Day...
Let us pray together: Thanks be to God.**

The National Day of Thanksgiving has come to be a day when we have made it our practice to give thanks. *There* is, you know, another time of thanks-giving, when we, with humility and reverence, have been urged by the saints, to give thanks. That time is not just now and is not just this coming week on Thursday. It is this day and every day.

- In Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians, he wrote: 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.”

You know, I don’t think that Jesus ever exactly TOLD his disciples to be thankful.

He gave them plenty of reasons to BE thankful and scriptures indicate that he himself gave thanks...and that people thanked HIM. Here are just a few of the *recorded* circumstances:

When... ³⁵ After Jesus had told the people to sit down, ³⁶ he took the seven loaves of bread and the fish and gave thanks. He then broke them and handed them to his disciples, who passed them around to the crowds...4000 people! **Matthew 15:36 CEV**

When he healed the 10 lepers...and ¹⁵When one of them discovered that he was healed, he came back, shouting praises to God. ¹⁶He bowed down at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.
Luke 17:15-16 CEV

At the time of his Last Supper, ²⁶ ... Jesus took some bread in his hands. He blessed the bread and broke it. Then he gave it to his disciples and said, “Take this and eat it. This is my body.”

²⁷ Jesus picked up a cup of wine and *gave thanks* to God. He then gave it to his disciples and said, “Take this and drink it. **Matthew 26:26-27 CEV**

When Lazarus had been dead for several days, and after the tomb had been opened,

⁴¹... Jesus looked up toward heaven and prayed, “Father, I thank you for answering my prayer.

⁴² I know that you always answer my prayers. But I said this, so the people here would believe you sent me.”

⁴³ When Jesus had finished praying, he shouted (to his friend), “Lazarus, come out!”

⁴⁴ The man who had been dead came out. **John 11: 41-44**

For all the times when we have had reason to praise God and for the times that it slipped our minds to turn back and give thanks. Let us pray together: Thanks be to God.

Billy Graham wrote this: “*Thanksgiving—the giving of thanks—to God for all His blessings should be one of the most distinctive marks of the believer in Jesus Christ. We must not allow a spirit of ingratitude to harden our heart and chill our relationship with God and with others.*

Nothing turns us into bitter, selfish, dissatisfied people more quickly, than an ungrateful heart. And nothing will do more to restore contentment and the joy of our salvation than a true spirit of thankfulness.

Wherever we are on our life’s journey today, whether it feels like a wilderness of unknowns or a gentle wave on the sunny beach of contentment, I am convinced that if we are truly thankful, even in this time of many transitions here at First Congregational UCC; even if our health is wavering; even if the pumpkin pie somehow doesn’t turn out; even if our relatives call to say that they are staying home on Thursday; even if the **only deer** you have seen was running across the highway *last* week ...even when we thought we were doing our best work and someone rejected our ideas, even when a high school teacher has told us that we are “not college material,” even when the company is downsizing and we will no longer be needed, even when we have been bullied... Even when....(you fill in the blank)...Yes, **even then** we will find that moment turned into a God-moment and that there will be gratefulness that follows.

Let us pray together: Thanks be to God.

I am thinking that you might be wondering how it is possible to give thanks when you can only think of things to grumble about. It certainly is difficult to give thanks when we, like the Israelites, in the Exodus story...blame God for our problems and begin to think that God has abandoned us... “*Why did you take us from Egypt and drag us out here into the desert to let our children and animals to die of thirst?*” (MSG)

We’ve been there. We’ve put God to the test, too. “Where are you, God, in these forest fires and in these hurricanes?” “Come on... stop the bullets from injuring the children.” “Break down the walls of our bitterness and mistrust, oh God.” “Let’s make a deal, God.”

Look back over your shoulders at the path...maybe it was a broken road...maybe it was a roller coaster-ride, maybe there were potholes and rocks...but, we got here, didn’t we? We have come through many dangers, toils and snares, right? Let’s commit to renewing our trust in God today and...

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We live in truly amazing times in this beautiful world...let’s think for a few moments. Answer these questions... out loud if you wish:

- What things are just unimaginably gorgeous? (the Grand Canyon...sunsets and sunrise)
- What things are amusing? (animals playing, children learning to speak)
- What takes our breath away? (a friend showing up who you haven’t seen in years....a squirrel looking in your patio door... an eagle swooping closely over the road in front of you)
- What things are unbelievable? (parents and birth children being reunited by DNA, discoveries of new galaxies ...stars)
- What are your favorite tastes? (chocolate, hamburger on the grill)

- What smells good to you? (Turkey baking, Coffee brewing)
- What sounds delight you? (The voices of children, music, the doorbell)
- Who is your favorite person in the world?

Again, **Let us pray together: Thanks be to God.**

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we are reminded of the gifts that each one of us has been given...of the diversity of talents and callings, ideas, heritages, abilities, that surround us in this very room. *The words of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians stand so true for us right here and right now "...and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good..."* **Let us pray together: Thanks be to God.**

Let us not worry about what feels like impossibilities: "What will **we** eat or drink?" or "What will **we** wear?" "What will we do now?" "How can we survive this?" Let's re-direct our **energies** to what Christians who, for over 2000 years have followed Jesus have done...and to how they have savored the resulting gratefulness of having acted on his words: "**Do this..**"

- Do worry about what our brothers and sisters are eating and be sure that they have enough food.
- Do be concerned about our neighbors, you know, the ones who live in their cars, and find ways to help them.
- Do give coats to the "coats for kids" project and help out in the food pantries; bring donations for the Leaven hygiene drive, send in your donations to benefit our Alternative Christmas Market missions, and volunteer to help serve community meals.
- Do visit or call someone who is alone today.
- Do knit a prayer shawl!
- Do cry with the sorrowful ones and laugh with those who are deliriously happy.

There is much more than this to do. Trust that God hears the cries of the poor and knows what **EACH ONE OF US IS** needing at this moment. If we have food & water, shelter and clothing and if we are able to reach out and help someone so that they may have the same, then, **Let us pray together: Thanks be to God.**

Being the Church, we are not only called to **give thanks** but to live as grateful people, "*Jesus people*," as we serve one another, not because we will get a free t-shirt, but because we are answering his call to, "**Go, do this.**" When we do, we will learn what deep and all-encompassing gratefulness feels like. **Let us pray together: Thanks be to God.**

We began our service with a part of Joyce Rupp's poem. Here is the rest of it:

November gestures with a wrinkled brown hand, beckons me wisely to consider those fleeting moments of grace in things quickly passing; a walk on a musky-wooded path, a cup of coffee silently savored, a birdsong in the squeaky hours of dawn, the gentle touch of a liver-spotted hand, a loving letter from a grateful stranger, a fading crescent moon in a royal blue sky.

I turn to gather remnants like these
in the come and go of my days,
and discover with surprise,
how quickly my inner room... is a harvest place of gold.

Let us pray together: Thanks be to God.