

Thank God!
Psalm 30
Luke 17:11-19

Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Psalm 30

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me.
O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.
O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.
For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved."

By your favor, O Lord, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed.

To you, O Lord, I cried, and to the Lord I made supplication:

"What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?"

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me! O Lord, be my helper!"

You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

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."

Have you ever noticed?

The people who are rich and famous, the people whom everyone in this room has heard of, everyone assumes that they are rich and famous because they are talented. And only because they are talented. And they say that they work hard, but, when we see them, they are much more likely to be playing hard.

When people, rich and famous or not, accept awards, they tend to thank people who helped them get to where they are. These people tend to be other rich and famous people. While there are exceptions, maybe one in ten,¹ they do not mention God, or, if they do thank God, it is as an afterthought. It's as if mentioning God would take away from how wonderful they themselves are.

We'll come back to that.

These last few weeks, we have been talking about the psalms, and about how they model for us how we should pray. We talked about psalms of praise: "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the Earth.", We talked about psalms of lament: "How long, O Lord, How long?". We talked about psalms of trust in God: "The Lord is my Shepherd." This week we're talking about another kind of psalm, and another kind of prayer, one that should be a basic part of all our prayer lives. And that is a psalm of thanks to God.

What do we have to thank God for?

Well, to start with, God did not create human beings and abandon us. God told us how to live best in the world, and how to be in good relationships with God and with each other. Most of the troubles in this world go back to people not following these instructions. We will talk about that later this Summer. But God loves us enough, that God told us how to live, to love God and to love our neighbors.

Thank God!

¹ The allusion to the Luke reading is intentional.

When God human beings did a terrible job of following those instructions, often missing the point altogether, God did not throw up the divine hands and walk away. If I were God, I'm sure I would have been tempted.

God sent messengers called prophets to lead people back to the way that God always wanted for us, the way that really does work best for us. God sent prophet after prophet. These prophets did incredible things and spoke amazing words, and, each time, the people would straighten up and fly right for a generation or so, and then go right back to copying the cruel, immoral ways of the nations around them. The immorality and viciousness of *A Game of Thrones* has nothing on some of the people in the Old Testament.

Finally, God, in the person of Jesus Christ, came down here and lived a human life. Jesus lived a sinless life, taught anyone who would listen how to live with God and with their neighbors, and eventually died and was resurrected for us.

We don't deserve this from God, but it happened anyway. We don't deserve for God to love us enough to do all that, but God does.

Thank God!

The same God who created the galaxies and the planets decided to create you. Not a generic "Human number six billion, three hundred seventeen million, one hundred fifteen thousand, five hundred and two," but Kevin, and Veronica, and Milo, and Mary Jane. Without God's choice to let the universe continue by slipping in a baby, and specifically you, you would not exist to be asking the question.

Thank God!

Then you were born where and when you were. Americans in the twentieth and twenty-first century AD live pretty good lives, historically and culturally speaking. We've spoken before about that average life expectancy has more than doubled since the Roman Empire, at least for us and for residents of other developed countries. We can generally expect to see the children whom we love grow up. Modern medicine is literally a miracle, that we have access to because we were born where and when we were.

Thank God!

Our nation talks a lot about division, but actual warfare tends to happen in other places. The last time a battle of a war happened on American soil was at Pearl Harbor, in 1941.² The last time before that was in 1865. We don't have bandits or pseudo-legitimate "army units" wandering around, taking what they want at the point of a sword, or a gun. Due to that lack of armed conflict, we have as many opportunities here and now as human beings have ever had, to build families and institutions that will outlast us.

Thank God!

You were born with the inborn talents and abilities that you have. Whether that is a head for numbers or a heart full of empathy, a strong body or a stubborn spirit that resists adversity, you were born with gifts. Lady Gaga is not the only one who was "born this way."³

Thank God!

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attack_on_Pearl_Harbor

³ Lady Gaga, *Born This Way* (2011).

Hopefully you've worked with your talents, expanded them like the servants in Jesus' parable of the talents.⁴ Malcolm Gladwell, the author of *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*, argues in his book *Outliers* that mastery of a skill comes with about ten thousand hours of focused practice.

You've turned those talents into something greater than you started with, but that would have come to little without that initial talent. I could spend ten thousand hours in vocal classes, but I don't think I'd ever get to the point where you'd want me singing a solo up here. That is just not the area of my gifts.

But that's OK.

I have other gifts. And so do you.

Thank God!

There is a thread of thought in our American society that wants to attribute all success solely to personal hard work and virtue. All the way back to before the Revolution, perhaps part of our anti-aristocratic streak, we Americans have been fascinated by the idea of the "Self-Made Man." Politicians claim to be "self-made men." Businesspeople claim to be "self-made people," no matter what advantages they started with.⁵ *Forbes* magazine recently made national news when they released a list of, "America's Richest Self-Made Women," a list that included reality TV stars and a hotel heiress. This list complements their list of "Richest Self-Made Billionaires," a list that includes several computer programmers, a stock market whiz, and the founder of an online shopping mall.

⁴ Matthew 25:14–30.

⁵ Mr. Donald Trump claiming to be "Self-made" because he had to pay back a \$1M loan to his father that got him started in real estate is just the most blatant example.

I have news for these people.

Any human being claiming to be “Self-Made” is not telling the truth. Anyone who claims to be self-made has paid attention neither in church, nor in family gatherings, nor in history class.

Any human being claiming to be “Self-Made” is not giving God credit for all that God has done for that person.

Every single human being has been given talents by God.

That includes the most talented, successful people on the face of the Earth. They were given talents, and they were born in a time and place where those talents were useful. A computer savant in ancient Athens would seem completely untalented. The talents that made a successful engineer for Caesar’s legions would, I suppose, make a decent hobbyist today.

That includes the apparently least successful, apparently least talented people on the face of the Earth. They are not using their talents, or they have talents that they are using in ways that don’t fit with worldly success. A God-given talent for empathy, for example, is no golden ticket to wealth, even if it is developed and used to help people.

That includes you. You have talents that God gave you for a reason. You have an environment that God put you in, for a reason.

Failing to give God credit for God’s gifts is ... tacky. At best, it is rude. At worst, it is slandering God and claiming personal credit for what God has done.

So, thank God!

Thank God for all that God has done for you!

And thank God by using the talents God gave you!

AMEN