

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL  
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Thanksgiving Sunday

November 21, 2021

PRELUDE “*We Gather Together*”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thanksgiving Eve worship at The Prayer Station – Wednesday, 6pm  
Decorate after worship next Sunday (11/28)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

**We glorify our God with songs of thanksgiving and joy.**

God has done great things for us, filling us with grace.

**God fed our ancestors in the wilderness, God clothes us with hope.**

We will offer our hearts to God, always saying, 'Thank you!' to the One who loves us.

**We will sing our praises, shouting of God's presence in our lives.**

(Thom M. Shuman, *Where the Broken Gather*)

HYMN No. 557 “*In Thanksgiving Let Us Praise God*”

From the first bright light of morning, To the last warm glow of dusk;

Every breath we take is sacred, For it is God's gift to us.

In thanksgiving let us praise God; In thanksgiving let us sing

Songs of praise and adoration To our gracious Lord, and King.

In the season of our plenty, In the season of our need;

We will find God's grace sufficient, We will find God's love complete...

Safe within God's hand that guides us, Hidden in God's healing wings;

Day by day God's love provides us Every good and perfect thing...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

**Gracious God, Source of all Blessings, you have been extravagant in your Generosity. You have planted within us the seeds of Hope. You have nurtured within us the saplings of Faith. You have harvested the fruits of your Creation and spread before us the feast of all Possibility. Words cannot express the gratitude with which we come before you. May we embody our thanks with extravagant generosity. May we offer our lives to you in acts of compassion for one another. May we walk gently upon the earth, ever mindful of your gifts of Breath, of Love, of Life itself. Amen.**

(Anne G. Cohen, *Before the Amen*)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1 Samuel 1:4-20

On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. She was deeply

distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. She made this vow: “O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.”

As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.” But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.” Then Eli answered, “Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.” And she said, “Let your servant find favor in your sight.” Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, “I have asked him of the LORD.”

### 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hannah prayed and said,

“My heart exults in the LORD;  
my strength is exalted in my God.  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
because I rejoice in my victory.

“There is no Holy One like the LORD,  
no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.

Talk no more so very proudly,  
let not arrogance come from your mouth;  
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,  
and by him actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty are broken,  
but the feeble gird on strength.

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,  
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.

The barren has borne seven,  
but she who has many children is forlorn.

The LORD kills and brings to life;  
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

The LORD makes poor and makes rich;  
he brings low, he also exalts.

He raises up the poor from the dust;  
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
to make them sit with princes  
and inherit a seat of honor.

For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,  
and on them he has set the world.

“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,  
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;  
for not by might does one prevail.  
The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered;  
the Most High will thunder in heaven.  
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;  
he will give strength to his king,  
and exalt the power of his anointed.”

#### SERMON

Barren would be one word for Hannah’s life. She’d been married to Elkanah for several years and had yet to feel the pitter patter of little feet in her womb. Since before she could remember, she’d been around the joy and excitement of a woman knowing she was pregnant and giving birth; and when the baby was a boy, the celebration was through the roof. Wasn’t that the reason they were here in the first place? There were other things women were expected to do, but none of it even came in a distant second compared to bearing children. Hannah knew her husband loved her, and that helped take the sting out of her barrenness, but she was also reminded everyday that his other wife, Peninnah was abundantly fruitful. As if the noise and confusion of her brood of kids didn’t rub enough salt in Hannah’s wounds, Peninnah never missed an opportunity to remind Hannah of the difference between them. It was hard to tell if she excelled more at childbearing or gloating, but between the two, Hannah’s life was wretched. Especially when they made their annual trips to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to God. Elkanah went out of his way to express his love for Hannah and to try and soften her pain, but when they were getting ready to offer sacrifices to God, there was only so much he could do in distributing the meat. Peninnah had to have enough to cover all her children; and Hannah had only herself to look after.

One year when Hannah was feeling especially empty and Peninnah was in rare form with her jabs and taunts, Hannah disintegrated into tears and pain while they were in Shiloh. Like many a well-meaning friend who simply isn’t comfortable with pain, Elkanah fussed and fretted, asking Hannah why she cried so much, why she was so sad, why she wasn’t eating. When all of that failed to get anywhere, he tried skooching close and asking if he wasn’t better than ten sons – at which point, Hannah got up and left the table all together. She walked right by Eli, the priest, on her way in to the temple in order to approach God. She wept bitterly, she prayed frantically, and she bargained like only a person at the end of her rope will: Please, God, if only you will show mercy on the misery of your servant and remember me by giving me a male child, I will give him back to you as a nazirite for the full extent of his life. Being a nazirite meant he would serve God, he would never drink wine, and no razor would ever touch his head. The book of Numbers tells us that nazirites mostly served for a specific amount of time, but then their service ended and they returned to their families. In her desperation, Hannah promised an open-ended arrangement. If she was allowed to have a son, she was willing to give him away to God. Puts a whole new perspective on the idea of giving the first fruits. Just how confident was she that once she conceived and gave birth to a son, more would follow? Did she really think it would be enough to know she had a son who existed down the road at the temple? Or was she so desperate that she didn’t think about the promise she was making?

The pathetic excuse of a priest, Eli, watched Hannah from the doorway where he’d been sitting for quite some time. He saw her lips move but he heard nothing, and so he jumped to some conclusions, approached her and told her she needed to lay off the wine. Hannah defended herself and assured Eli that she had been pouring out her soul to God in desperate prayer, and so he sent her on her way with a bland blessing. Hannah returned home with her husband, ate and drank, and before long became pregnant. Once she gave birth to her son, she loved and cared for him passionately, and for several

years resisted returning to Shiloh with the rest of the household. She remembered the promise that she had made to God, and she had every intention of keeping it. But the length of time that Hannah delayed her return, the number of years that she protested the boy had not yet been weaned make it very clear what a costly promise it was. She knew God had been faithful and she knew she would be faithful, and she also took delight in cradling and loving her son.

This story displays a profound intimacy between Hannah and God. She presented herself to God in the temple with candid honesty and unfiltered urgency. She was tired of making nice and putting up; she knew what she wanted and she knew who could give it to her; she wanted it now and she wanted it with everything she had in her. So she went to God and laid it all out on the table: the hurt and pain, the emptiness and suffering, the humiliation and desperation – as well as the hope and confidence that God could transform her barrenness into life and wonder and joy. She knew that her emptiness could not be filled by her own or her husband's actions. She knew that no amount of food or alcohol, busyness or distraction, buying or selling or building or arming would make a difference. And she knew that she didn't have to accept barrenness as the last and final word. She took all of that and laid it before God in clear sentences and pushy prayers. She poured her heart out before God, and God answered her prayers, filled her with a child, and brought life and beauty to her barren world.

There's a lot of power and beauty in this story, but there are also a host of potholes and dangers, the most glaring of which is that not everyone who pours their heart out to God gets exactly what they ask for. The whole question of infertility is one that many couples and many women agonize over and spend fortunes on – sometimes with good results, sometimes not. And it's a hazard that surfaces in other situations too, times when people pray and pray and pray, pounding on God's door day and night, while their plea goes unanswered. If they stay razor focused on the one thing they're pleading for, there's a good chance they just may go away feeling unheard and unanswered, or like maybe they didn't pray hard enough; all the while missing out on what God has done and the ways in which God has been present. I have a cousin who is currently in treatment for Stage 4 cancer, and every time we exchange messages, he declares his deep, deep faith in God and Jesus, and his trust and confidence that they will heal him. I pray he's right, but I also admit that what I assure him of is that God is with him and will be by his side every step of the way; that God heals and holds him in love. What I haven't said to him is that I don't pretend to know what form that healing will take in his case; nor have I cautioned him not to get so fixated that he misses out on the presence and grace of God in the very heart of his cancer.

Hannah prayed and poured out her heart to God; she conceived and gave birth and then handed her son over to God; and oh, by the way, she did later give birth to three more sons and two daughters. She also sang a song of praise, and that's the second reading we heard a little while ago. The song rejoices at the gift that has been given to her and the ways that her life has been filled, but the longer we listen, the more we recognize that it is not just her barrenness that God has transformed. God has raised up the poor from the dust, has lifted the needy from the ash heap, has given seats of honor to the outcast and the downtrodden. God has taken hold of the barren world in which Hannah's people live and turned it into a world of life and beauty, promise and joy. Debie Thomas describes it this way: "What particularly strikes me about Hannah's song is the way it frames the birth of Samuel in the broadest possible context, such that Hannah's personal joy becomes the joy of a wholly repaired and redeemed world... In the world Hannah sings into being, the arrogant are silenced, the feeble are strengthened, the mighty are humbled, and the barren are fertile. Her son's birth is a sign that God is on the move, healing and remaking all things. It's not simply that God heals *her* barrenness; she sings of a God whose abundance enlivens everyone. It's not enough that God intervenes in her *private* experience of injustice; she sings of justice and equity for all." ("Pouring Out My Soul", *Journey with Jesus*, posted 7 November 2021)

This year as I approach Thanksgiving, I'm drawn by the full scope of Hannah's story. As you've heard me say far more often than you're likely to have any desire to hear, there's a lot that is not right in our world. Barrenness might be one word for what ails us, but there are others. Weariness. Division. Hostility. Grief. Racism. Selfishness. Hopelessness. Some of it is profoundly personal, some of it is pretty cosmic and universal. I'm not going to suggest that we take those concerns and wounds to the Thanksgiving table for holiday talk, but I would encourage us to take them directly to God. To follow Hannah's lead and find a time to talk with God in candid honesty and unfiltered urgency; lay it all out on the table: the hurt and pain, the emptiness and suffering, the humiliation and desperation – as well as the hope and confidence that God can transform our tangled, toxic mess into life and wonder and joy. And maybe, once we've done that, we can also join Hannah in singing praise – offering our gratitude and praise for healing and hope – for ourselves and those we love, and then for others as well. Even if all is not yet right, and God hasn't rearranged the quagmire as we've laid out, perhaps we can look around and recognize the good God is doing, the ways in which God is present and on the move, healing and remaking all things.

Let us come before God with all of who we are, trusting that God will meet us there, receive us, hear us, heal us, love and transform us. And then let us go out singing God's praise, for the ways and places in which God is even now transforming our world into one of life and beauty, promise and joy, wholeness and love. Amen.

HYMN No. 43    *“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”*

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father, There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not; As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.  
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness! Morning by morning, new mercies I see;  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided – Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!...

PASTORAL PRAYER

O Holy One, where do we even begin? You so generously fill our lives to overflowing with an abundance of gifts and graces that our attempts to express gratitude barely scratch the surface. For the privilege of living in a land of breathtaking beauty and boundless opportunities to enjoy that creation; for animals small and large, birds of prey and songbirds that call us to joy; for plants and trees that support and nourish our living; mountains and lakes, night skies and morning stillness, fertile fields and underground treasures. For the miracle of our bodies, the ability to breathe and eat, stand and walk; taste, touch, smell, see and hear; think and reason, create and love. For the companions with whom we share our lives: parents, siblings, spouses, children and grandchildren; friends and neighbors, bridge partners and pickle ball players; the pets who take us on walks, sit by our side, and sleep on our laps. For the rich diversity of peoples with whom we share this land, people of different colors and traditions, lifestyles and faiths, who see life through a different lens than we do and with whom and from whom we can learn and share, dream and grow. Help us to cherish the gifts with which you bless us, to put them to the use you intend in the giving, and to bless the lives of others through the sharing of your abundant love.

God of all love and compassion, we bring before you the needs and the wounds of your people. For all those who are sick in body, mind or spirit, grieving the loss of a loved one or the people and place they called home, for caregivers and health care workers who grow weary of a job that never ends, those battling addiction or struggling against depression. For communities confronting flooding and freezing, the aftermath of hurricanes and tornadoes, the devastation of wildfires and drought. For our nation as courts hear and decide cases of murder and protest; for the people and businesses of Kenosha,

Wisconsin, Brunswick, Georgia and Charlottesville, Virginia; for the families of the deceased as well as the accused; for the racial injustice that continues to wound and harm, divide and diminish. Open our ears and our hearts that we might listen to the reality of others and grow in understanding and compassion, and learn to recognize and love one another as your beloved children.

Hear our prayers, O God, spoken and unspoken. And hear us as we join together in the prayer that Jesus taught, saying: Our Father...

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

OFFERING

If I had a bouquet of white carnations and I wanted blue ones, I could add a bunch of blue dye to a vase of water, put the carnations into the water and watch while they slowly turned blue. As they drink the water and draw it up the stem, out into the leaves and spread steadily throughout the petals, the evidence of what was in the glass would become more and more obvious for all to see. The same is true of us. As we root our lives in God and in God's love, the presence of that love steadily spreads throughout our lives and becomes more and more visible for all to see. The gifts that we give to support the church's ministry are one of the vital ways we express that love, as well as donations to the Food Bank and other essential ministries. We also display God's love through the acts of kindness we offer others, gestures of welcome, gifts of hospitality, words of grace.

Thank you to those who have turned in a pledge card, communicating your intentions to support our life together in the coming year. Thank you for all that you give, all that you do and all that you are.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

**O God, the source of all good things, we bring to you our gifts. Enable us, with our earthly things, to give you the love of our hearts and the service of our lives. And help us to root our lives in you, that your love may spread and grow, blossom and bear fruit in and through us; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Savior. Amen.**  
(Chalice Worship, revised)

HYMN No. 59 *"I Sing the Mighty Power of God"*

I sing the mighty power of God, That made the mountains rise;  
That spread the flowing seas abroad, And built the lofty skies.  
I sing the wisdom that ordained The sun to rule the day;  
The moon shines full at His command, And all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord, That filled the earth with food;  
God formed the creatures with His word, And then pronounced them good.  
Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed, Where'er I turn my eye:  
If I survey the ground I tread, Or gaze upon the sky!

There's not a plant or flower below, But makes Thy glories known;  
And clouds arise, and tempests blow, By order from Thy throne;  
While all that borrows life from Thee Is ever in Thy care,  
And everywhere that we can be, Thou God, art present there.

BENEDICTION

The world now is too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but love. May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone. Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor. May your hands be so blessed that everything you touch is a sacrament. Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love. May your feet be so blessed you run to those who need you. And may your heart be so opened, so set on fire, that your love, *your* love, changes everything. And may the blessing of the God who created you, loves you, and sustains you, be with you now and always. Amen.  
(Black Rock Prayer Book)



*They are like trees  
planted by streams of  
water, which yield their  
fruit in its season.*

*Psalm 1: 3a*

Rooted in

LOVE

## Planted by Streams of Water

by Rev. Alex Shea Will

The Psalms often compare us to animals in search of water. In the 23rd, we are the sheep who drink from calm waters. In the 42nd, we are the deer, longing for God as the deer longs for the stream. But in the 1st Psalm, something is different. We are not the animals passing from stream to stream. We are the tree, fixed in the riverside. Our roots running deep and wide, nourished by the waters of God's mercy and love, and the collective ecosystem.

While I love the beauty of the 23rd and 42nd Psalms, the imagery of the 1st Psalm is the most moving because it is the image of life in Christian community. We do not come and go from the stream, taking only what we need, when we need it. Our roots are firmly planted, and growing deeper and stronger by the day. We not only take from the ecosystem, but we also contribute to it. We're committed to this spot, this ecosystem - no matter the changing of the seasons.

In a culture where it is easy to pick up and look for a new stream, covenant calls us to plant something lasting. My financial generosity to the church is one way I declare that I am not merely passing by; I'm planting roots. It's how I proclaim that I am invested in the flourishing of our riverside. It's how I communicate that my thriving depends on our thriving.

Let us pray:

*Gracious God, inspire my generosity so that my roots grow deeper and stronger. Amen.*

### CONSIDER YOUR PLEDGE AS A PERCENT OF YOUR MONTHLY INCOME.

Annual Income	Monthly Income	2%	3%	4%	5%	10%
16,000	1,333	27	40	53	67	133
20,000	1,667	33	50	67	83	167
25,000	2,083	42	62	83	104	208
30,000	2,500	50	75	100	125	250
35,000	2,917	58	88	117	146	292
40,000	3,333	67	100	133	167	333
45,000	3,750	75	113	150	188	375
50,000	4,167	83	125	167	208	417
60,000	5,000	100	150	200	250	500
75,000	6,250	125	188	250	313	625
100,000	8,333	167	250	333	417	833
125,000	10,417	208	313	417	521	1042

On average, Americans give 2% of their income to charity. Giving even 1% more of annual income to charity would be transformative for our congregation and other organizations doing good in our community.