

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
Thanksgiving Sunday
Sunday, October 12, 2025**

**“Give Thanks to Him”
Psalm 100**

The Rev. Dr. David Clark

When you woke up this morning, did you feel especially thankful? When you got up, and got ready for worship, did you feel more thankful than usual? Now, it's very possible that you're feeling exceedingly thankful this morning; it's also possible that, right now, you are feeling anything but thankful.

Today is Thanksgiving Sunday, which gives us an opportunity to reflect on what it means to offer our thanks to God. But to start, I think it's worth acknowledging that we often tie gratitude to success: that is, we often regard thanksgiving as the proper response for when things are going well for us. But that makes it seem like thanksgiving is only appropriate when our circumstances are good.

You can hear examples of this each year around Thanksgiving. If you get together with family, someone may suggest at the dinner table: “let's all say what we're thankful for.” And then you go around while everyone recites their successes and accomplishments in the past year—new jobs, promotions, or whatever.

But what about when things are going wrong? What about when we're anxious or worried or stressed? See, here's the problem with tying gratitude to success: when we experience not successes but failures, when losses pile up, should we then cease to give thanks to God? If we thank God only when there is food on the table, *what if the table is bare?* What then?

The late biblical scholar James Mays once preached a sermon for the Thanksgiving service at the seminary where he taught—though at the time, students were preparing for exams scheduled for just after Thanksgiving. Now he understood very well that a group of students stressed out about exams didn't necessarily feel very thankful that day—and so he offered an approach to thanksgiving that isn't tied to our successes.

In the sermon, he said: since “these days are the prelude to [...] examinations [...], [a] few of us may be in no mood to give thanks just now. If that be the case, then we need to hear the Word in the One Hundredth Psalm.” He said, “Here is Scripture's call to a

response to God that will not wait for quieter or freer times. It insists that the many things that press upon us [...] are the very occasions for praising God.”

How, then, does Psalm 100 offer us an approach to thanking God that isn’t tied to our successes? How does this psalm show us a way to thank God even when we are stressed or anxious or facing failure? In this psalm, we find a way of thanksgiving that is rooted—not in the successes that come and go—but rooted solely and deeply in the goodness and grace of God.

Psalm 100 opens with an energetic call to thanksgiving, praise, and worship:

“Make a joyful noise to the LORD,

all the earth,” the psalmist says,

“Worship the LORD with gladness;

come into his presence with singing” (vv. 1-2).

Notice the excitement, the enthusiasm: it’s not just “[m]ake a [...] noise,” but “[m]ake a *joyful* noise”; it’s not just “[w]orship the LORD,” but “[w]orship the LORD *with gladness*.” And in the original language, the word for ‘worship’ here also means ‘to serve’ (עָבַד; cf. RSV): this is about offering our entire selves to God in joyful thanksgiving.

So what’s the source of this gratitude? What gives rise to the psalmist’s enthusiastic thanksgiving to God? Do you think it’s because the psalmist has landed a high-paying job, has lots of expensive things—and now feels thankful? No. The psalmist’s thanksgiving is not tied to successes; rather, the psalmist gives thanks *because of the grace and goodness of God*. The psalm begins with thanksgiving, and then we hear the grace that gives rise to that thanksgiving:

“Know that the LORD is God.

It is he that made us,

and we are his;

we are his people,

and the sheep of his pasture” (v. 3).

Why does the psalmist give thanks? Because of successes? No, because “the LORD is God”—and we belong to him. To say that “*the LORD is God*” means that those things that threaten us are not; it means that sickness and death are not God and don’t get the final say; it means that our failures and brokenness are not God and will not in the end define us. To say that “the LORD is God” means that all those powers that threaten us or have power over us—these are not God, because only the Lord of love is God.

And not only that, but we *belong* to this merciful God; “It is he that made us,” the psalmist says, “*and we are his*” (v. 3). We belong to the one who created us and loves us, who leads us and protects us like a shepherd. All our stresses and fears and pressures and failures—we don’t belong to those; they don’t own us. We belong to God. The Heidelberg Catechism, a document from our tradition written in the sixteenth century, begins by asking this question: “What is your only comfort, in life and in death?”—and the answer begins: “That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to my self but to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.”

This is a profound affirmation of God’s goodness and kindness; this is grace. So what does the psalmist do next? The psalmist gives thanks to God, of course! After declaring God’s goodness and grace, the psalmist goes on to say:

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him,
bless his name” (v. 4).

Again, the psalmist gives thanks—not because of personal circumstances or successes, but simply because of the goodness of God.

And what comes next in this rhythm of thanksgiving? In this rhythm of God’s grace and the psalmist’s gratitude, what comes next is another affirmation of the grace of God:

“For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations” (v. 5).

Before, the psalmist declared that “the LORD is God,” and now we hear that “the LORD is good.” For the psalmist, this is a witness to God’s goodness that had arisen over centuries; to say that God’s “steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations”—this is to declare that God’s goodness is not temporary or changeable, because God is good—period—now and always. The psalmist affirms the goodness of God that God’s people Israel had come to know across the generations—a God they could always trust and rely on—so that the psalmist could affirm, without any hesitation or qualification, that God is good—and good always.

Then what comes next? In this psalm, we heard thanksgiving then God’s grace, and thanksgiving then God’s grace—so what should come next? More thanksgiving, right? But that’s the end of the psalm... And yet, after hearing this rhythm of grace and gratitude, God’s goodness and our thanksgiving—doesn’t it feel like something is missing? Like there should be another response of thanksgiving? Well, there can be—if we continue this rhythm of thanksgiving in our lives.

And we can share in this rhythm of thanksgiving whether or not our circumstances are favourable, whether we feel like everything's going well or like everything's falling apart. Because in this psalm, we find a way of thanksgiving that is not tied to successes and failures, a way of thanksgiving that enables us to offer our gratitude to God no matter our circumstances—because the Lord is God and the Lord is good.

At the beginning of this sermon—as I reflected on giving thanks to God even when things go wrong—I asked: if we thank God only when there is food on the table, *what if the table is bare?* What then? Well, in one of the previous churches I served, there was an older Dutch gentleman, who has since passed away. As a child in the Netherlands, before moving to Canada, he lived through the Second World War and the German occupation. And there had been times, during the war, when his family simply had no food to put on the dinner table.

And when that happened, when there really was nothing to eat, his family still set the table, with empty plates, and sat down together, and gave thanks to God, and then arose and cleared the table—because for them the most important part of the meal was not the food but giving thanks, because—no matter our circumstances—the grace and goodness of God call for our thanksgiving. Amen.