



# Reconnect

I was glad when they said unto me,  
Let us go into the house  
of the LORD.

PSALM 122:1



# *Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost*

## **November 22, 2020**

**Prelude:**

**Prelude in C Major**

**JS Bach**

### **Let Us Rejoice as We Worship:**

In deep gratitude we come to worship God.  
We recognize God as the source of all goodness.  
All good gifts come from the Spirit of God:  
Love, peace, joy, patience, kindness and gentleness are all of God.  
We come with grateful hearts, not for things, but for who God is.  
We gather to show our gratitude in song and prayer.

### **Opening Hymn:**

**“Come, Ye Thankful People, Come”**

Come, ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home;  
All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin;  
God our Maker doth provide for our wants to be supplied;  
Come to God’s own temple, come, raise the song of harvest home.

All the world is God’s own field, fruit unto His praise to yield;  
Wheat and tares together sown, unto joy or sorrow grown;  
First the blade, and then the ear, then the full corn shall appear:  
Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be.

For the Lord our God shall come, and shall take His harvest home;  
From His field shall in that day all offenses purge away;  
Give His angels charge at last in the fire the tares to cast;  
But the fruitful ears to store in His garner evermore.

Even so, Lord, quickly come, bring Thy final harvest home;  
Gather Thou Thy people in, free from sorrow, free from sin,  
There, forever purified, in Thy garner to abide;  
Come, with all Thine angels come, raise the glorious harvest home.

### **A Time of Prayer:**

God of endless providing, we give thanks for both the simple, ordinary ways you sustain us and for the complex, amazing gifts of your creation:

For the warm scent of fresh bread and the sharp taste of icy water; for the elusive touch of a spider’s web and the hidden center of a black hole; for the gift of loyal companions on long journeys; for the myriad communities and cultures who find you in their midst; for all the ways you reveal yourself, whether close at

Do not let us become complacent. Keep us always mindful of your care for us, that we may remain your grateful people, servants praying in the name of the Servant. Amen.

## “We Gather Together”

Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining,  
Ordaining, maintaining his kingdom divine;  
So from the beginning the fight we were winning;  
Thou, Lord, wast at our side; all glory be thine!

### A Reading from the Scriptures:

Ephesians 1:15-23 (NIV)

15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18 so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. 20 God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

## Cantique

## JS Bach

**“Thanks, but for what?”**

It's Thanksgiving week. Time to count your blessings. This has certainly been a rough year and harder to recognize those things for which we should be grateful and thankful. So what blessings do you have?

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a



place to sleep ... you are richer than 75 percent of this world of ours.

If you have money in the bank, cash in your wallet and spare change in a dish someplace ... you are among the top 8 percent of the Earth's wealthiest people.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness ... you are more fortunate than the million who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation ... you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.

If you can attend this worship service either in-person or virtually, or any other religion-related meeting, without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death ... you are fortunate. Billions of people in the world cannot.

It's not hard for us to count our blessings, is it? The problem is we have a hard time recognizing what those blessings might be. Most of us could quickly and easily jot down a rather lengthy list, including thanks for family, for friends, for food, for clothing, for cars, for a home, for a job, for health, for freedom, for opportunity, and so on.

But think about this. If we follow this logic, then it means that if we lack these things, we cannot give thanks. We can count our blessings only if we have stuff to count. However, the apostle Paul encourages us to give thanks for nothing. In fact, he offers us the example of his own thanksgiving for nothing at all - not one physical, material, tangible thing.

Instead, Paul gives constant thanks for things which are not things: Faith in the Lord Jesus, love toward the saints, a spirit of wisdom and revelation, the riches of God's glorious inheritance and the immeasurable greatness of God's power (Ephesians 1:15-19). None of these blessings can be seen, touched, purchased or possessed - like food, clothing, cars, boats or homes. And yet, they are the very greatest gifts we could ever receive. To give thanks for the nontangibles, or in the vortex of violence, despair and suffering is what Scripture calls praise. Praise is the recognition that it is all about God and not about me.

In Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic book *The Little Prince*, the fox character is saying goodbye to the little prince, and as he leaves he says, "And now here's my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

"What is essential is invisible to the eye," the little prince repeats, so that he will be sure to remember. This fox's insight is right in line with what the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

It is the unseen that is eternal. What is essential is invisible to the eye.

This approach to Thanksgiving runs counter to conventional wisdom, and it refuses to fall into step with the swarm of shoppers that will surge into shopping malls this Friday to begin the Christmas buying binge. "Black Friday," they call it - the biggest shopping day of the year. It's not black because it's bad, according to merchants, but because they count on it to turn the red in their books to black. They should call it "Green Friday," the color of money.

But stop to ponder the perspective of the apostle Paul. He doesn't give thanks for gold jewelry, Game Cubes, leather jackets, personal care products, computer games

and other high technology gadgets. He refuses to focus his gaze on the things that can be seen, because he knows that these things are temporary.

Instead, he looks only at the essential and eternal things that are invisible to the eye. When he counts his blessings, he lists absolutely nothing you can buy, and nothing you can own - only faith, love, a spirit of wisdom, a spirit of revelation, God's inheritance, God's power.

Paul first gives thanks for faith and love. "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints," he reports, "and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you" (1:15). Paul knows that the sign of true success is not a Lexus, or a house in the Hamptons, or a job with a six-figure salary. Instead, success is being a person who trusts Christ completely, and who loves neighbors consistently. This living out of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of life - a vertical relationship with Jesus, combined with a horizontal relationship with neighbor - is the key to a perfectly balanced and fulfilling life.

Paul also gives thanks for a spirit of wisdom and revelation (v. 17), which he prays will come out of our ever-expanding relationship with God through Christ. This spirit of wisdom opens our eyes to what God is planning for us, and it helps us to see that there is nothing richer or more valuable than a life in communion with God, both today and in the life to come. It is with this spirit of wisdom and revelation that we can finally grasp the riches of God's glorious inheritance (v. 18), a heavenly inheritance far more valuable than stocks or bonds or savings accounts or real estate.

The final invisible item that Paul wants us to appreciate is the immeasurable greatness of God's power, a power that has raised Jesus Christ from the dead and seated him in the heavenly places. This power has put Jesus in a place of ultimate authority, far above every earthly ruler, not only in this age but also in the age to come, so that everything on earth is now under the soles of his sandals (vv. 19-22).

In short, Jesus rules.

But the best part is this: God's amazing power is at work in those of us who believe, and this power is experienced as we take part in the life of the body of Christ, that body of believers known as the Christian church (vv. 19, 23). It doesn't really matter how much wealth or power or prestige or personnel or inventory or square footage we control in this world, because our greatest influence comes through our work as disciples of Christ.

- It is as followers of Jesus that we experience the divine life and power of God that fills all things.
- It is as followers of Jesus that we are able to endure incredible hardship and overcome enormous personal obstacles.
- It is as followers of Jesus that we are able to share the love and grace and hope and peace and forgiveness of our Lord.
- It is as followers of Jesus that we are able to step out in mission and share the gospel in both our words and our deeds.

None of these is a "thing," in a material sense. But whether we are rich or poor, homeowners or homeless, working or unemployed, we have access to an amazing set of essential, eternal, unseen treasures.

As Christians, we can honestly say to God:  
Thanks for everything.

**A Time of Prayer** – let us remember all of our brothers and sisters on the prayer list, especially those who are having a difficult time during this period of social distancing. Please share your prayer concerns so that they may be added to the prayer list by emailing your concern to Pastor Dave at dbhanks92@comcast.net or by calling him direct at 978-821-9571. He is available every evening and on weekends. During this time we suggest that you create a prayer partner with whom you can pair up until we are able to worship together at the church.

Today we make a joyful noise to you, O Lord. We come into your presence with singing, we worship you with gladness, we celebrate with joy as your entire creation gives you praise. The very mountains and hills are bursting into song, and all the trees of the field are clapping their hands! We praise you, God, we praise you!

We know that you are our God. It is you who made us, and we are yours. We thank you for your precious gifts of faith in the Lord Jesus, love toward one another, the spirit of wisdom and the grace we see in the sacraments of baptism and holy communion. We praise you for giving us deep roots in this community, protection from danger and the support and fellowship of brothers and sisters in the faith. May we never forget that we are your people, the sheep of your pasture, and that we need you, our Good Shepherd, and one another.

Good and gracious God, your steadfast love endures forever, as well as your faithfulness to all generations. Continue to bring healing to the ill, comfort to the grieving, direction to the lost, serenity to the anxious and justice to the oppressed. Make us into instruments of your peace, so that we may carry your love into the midst of hatred, and faith into places of despair and doubt. Inspire us always to be your grateful people, so that in every time and place we may give thanks to you and bless your holy name. With the confidence that comes from being children of God, we are now bold to pray as Jesus taught us ..... “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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”

**Closing Hymn:****“Now Thank We All Our God”**

Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,  
who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices;  
who from our mothers’ arms has blessed us on our way  
with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,  
with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us,  
to keep us in his grace, and guide us when perplexed,  
and free us from all ills of this world in the next.

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,  
the Son and Spirit blest, who reign in highest heaven  
the one eternal God, whom heaven and earth adore;  
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

**Benediction:**

Go forth with thankful hearts. Go forth into the world with God's renewing and strengthening Spirit. May that Spirit fill us full of praise and joy throughout every day of life. Amen.

**Postlude:****Intrada****Grayston Ives****PRAYER LIST**

Amy Belli  
Carolyn Barney  
Jack Brigham  
Becky Colwell  
David Dufour  
Diana Escarbie  
Cathy Fontaine  
Chuck Funk  
Bob and Pat Goguen  
Jerilyn Hoffman  
Linda Hurd  
Mary Jackson  
Tom Kazanjian  
Sarah Kee  
Bob and Doris Lane  
Diane Lane Cormier  
Linda Long

Lorraine Michaud  
Audrey Painchaud  
Maria Piazza  
Emma Pollice  
Melanie Pouliot  
Jackie Reiss  
Martha Quinn  
Del Sampson  
Elwin Shepard  
Ron Smith  
Arlene Sirois  
Diane Staples  
Carole Ann Sumner and Henry  
Donna Thorne  
Daniel Tousignant  
Marilyn Wales  
Mary Wayman

All who are experiencing difficult times and situations

All who are lonely or depressed

All who are personally dealing with the affects of the COVID-19 Virus

All medical personnel – doctors, nurses, testing staff, first responders

Our Church and all of its members and friends

All members of our armed forces who have committed themselves to the  
protection of liberty

# **Rollstone Congregational Church**

## **United Church of Christ**

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