

**Laity Sunday**  
November 10, 2013

It is an honor to be asked to speak to you this morning.

As I was looking through the scriptures over the past week, Psalm 145 spoke to me:

**“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; His greatness is unsearchable.”**

It is easy to praise God when the sun is shining, our family is healthy, and everything is good. But when the storm clouds gather, and the trials come, sometimes the last thing we feel like doing is praising God. Yet, this is the very time when we need to lift our voices to Him in praise.

When we praise God, we proclaim our faith in Him. Our praise is something that we offer to God — in times of well-being and in times of sorrow. It’s important to never allow praise to become a trite activity. It is a priceless honor to kneel before the throne of our Lord and Savior.

Everyone appreciates being recognized for efforts and achievements. The manner in which we prefer to receive recognition varies from individual to individual, but the bottom line is still the same – a simple sincere “thank you” can go a long way. Most times, it’s not as much about “thank you” as the fact that someone recognized our efforts and took the time to tell us so. If appreciation, recognition and praise are important to us – imagine what it means to God!

One of the greatest misconceptions concerning praise is that it is something we do for God. However, nothing could be further from the truth. God does not need our praise, but certainly, He desires it.

God knows when life takes an unexpected turn toward sorrow or when a serious illness lingers for months and even years, praise has the ability to lighten our hearts and fill us with a sense of love and security that can only come from heaven's throne.

Praise teaches us to be joyful and thankful regardless of our circumstances. It prepares us for God's service and helps us to see beyond our present circumstances to the immense possibilities that are ours through faith in Jesus Christ.

No matter how deep our sorrow or how grave our circumstances may seem, we can learn to praise God while acknowledging His sovereignty over our lives. This sounds like good advice, but what do you do when life becomes so dark that it seems impossible to praise God? How do

you lift your voice to the Lord in praise during the tough times? How do we praise God when a loved one has cancer? Or when someone dies unexpectedly?

We begin by realizing that praise is a sacrifice — an offering to the Lord. It does not lessen our sorrow or, in many cases, change our immediate circumstances. It will, however, bring light to our darkness — a light that Satan cannot extinguish.

Thanksgiving is just around the corner. When we think about the first Thanksgiving, the Pilgrims didn't have too much of anything, did they? They had no transportation, they had no indoor plumbing, and they didn't have nice homes. Yet they saw reasons to give thanks to God for the many blessings they did have.

The Pilgrims didn't have abundance, but they focused on what they had and gave God thanks and praise. That's a lesson we can still learn from today. For many people today, in the middle of abundance, we concentrate on the lack. I believe that we spend too much time thinking that we could be happier "if" we had some of this, or "if" we had more of that. That mindset robs us of completely recognizing what we do have and how much God has blessed us.

On Thanksgiving Day, we will all offer up thanks, but will we truly be thankful? I challenge each of us to think of thankfulness in two steps: Step 1: Start seeing God clearly and Step 2: See yourself as you really are.

#### **STEP # 1 - START SEEING GOD CLEARLY**

In PSALM 145, we see some of God's characteristics. Certainly, nobody can understand just how great our Lord is. He is great beyond any human description or comprehension.

In verses 4-6 we read,

**"One generation will commend Your works to another; they will tell of Your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on Your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim Your great deeds."**

Two things jump out at me as I read these verses. The first thing is that one generation will tell another. That means that God's Truth will never be stopped. It will continue until the very last generation.

The second is that God is so much more than we can even understand. He is worthy of our praise. He has mighty acts; glorious splendor of majesty; He has wonderful works that need to be pondered and focused on; and He has powerfully awesome works that need to be proclaimed forth from every single Christian.

## STEP # 2 – SEE YOURSELF AS YOU REALLY ARE

We are creatures of this world. This world is sinful, and therefore, we are sinful creatures. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. Praise God for his grace and mercy! We are saved by grace – not by our own works!

Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This tells us that if we have trusted Jesus as Savior, we have peace. That is something else that we need to thank our mighty God for. The world has no peace, because the world is under the influences of Satan, and Satan has no peace. He is the prince of chaos.

In the upcoming weeks as we prepare our Thanksgiving Day meals and use that day of thankfulness to go into the season of the Christmas, let us do so by understanding just why we need to be thankful.

Someone once said that if we have nothing else to be thankful for, we can always be thankful that we are not the turkey. I think we have much more to be thankful for, don't you? I think we can be thankful that God loved us enough to save us; that He loved us enough to forgive us; and that He continues to love us enough to reach down and help those in need.

As we look around us this Thanksgiving season, we will surely see those who have much more than we do, but we will also see many who have much less than we do.

I hope we will remember that every breath we take, every sight we see, and every feeling we feel is nothing more than a very special gift of love from God to us.

And that should bring forth what all of us need all year long; a true attitude of gratitude. Our Father will extend His Son to all who wish to receive Him. But we have to see this very clearly, too. We cannot just take portions of His Son. We cannot just take His Son on some days and forget about Him on others. He wants to be the Lord of our lives – every day!

None of us will ever be the best we can be here on this earth. That is why we must continually strive to be in Christ every single minute. He is the source of our joy!

The words "happiness" and "joy" are often used interchangeably, but they have different meanings and focus:

<b>Meaning:</b>	<b>Happiness</b>	<b>Joy</b>
	Happiness is an emotion in which one experiences feelings ranging from contentment and satisfaction to bliss and intense pleasure.	Joy is a "state of being". It could be connected to great or calm delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying; keen pleasure; elation. More permanent than happiness.
<b>Causes:</b>	External sources: Events, Feelings	Inward sources: Spiritual presence
<b>Emotion:</b>	outward expression of elation	inward peace and contentment

It's my prayer for you to have joy.

One of my favorite reminders of how to achieve joy spells it out – letter by letter:

J – Jesus first

O – Others next

Y – Yourself last

I believe God speaks to us in the ways we hear Him best, and for me, one way is through music. As I was preparing this message, a song kept playing in my head, and I think it sums up this message very clearly.

My Tribute – To God be the Glory! ☺