God’s Steadfast Love Endures Forever

Psalm 136:1-9 Kimby Young

Joshua 24:14-18 November 12, 2023

Give thanks to the Lord for God is good. God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Psalm 136 is one of the oldest Psalms and it obviously was responsive. The priest or leader would say a line – like give thanks to the God of heaven. And all the people would respond God’s love endures forever. The part we read today is the story of creation and giving thanks to the Creator. The next part is about entering the promised land which ties well with the assembly we heard from Joshua today. We could add stanza after stanza, page after page, naming every way God has blessed us and loved us. Naming one after another all of God’s gifts to us. For a beautiful sanctuary. For a community of faithful. For a strong heritage. For great mission outreach. For each way God has blessed this congregation and each one of us. Give thanks to the Lord for God is good. God’s steadfast love endures forever.

That’s what stewardship season is about in the church. Not about the money - though the money is a reflection of our grateful response to God. And of course, we need the money to do all we do. Really, stewardship in the church is about giving thanks to God. We take stock of where we are, how God has blessed us, and in what ways God is calling us to respond. Then in gratitude we pledge to serve God in whatever way we feel called, in whatever ways we are able. Yes, we are pledging money. But even more so we are thanking God. We are promising God that we will remember every single way God has shown love to us. Further we will extend that love into the world in faithful ways.

I am glad that today we are also packing boxes for Operation Christmas Child. That is just one of many examples of ways we share God’s love in tangible positive ways. We show our gratitude for all of God’s love. Of course it goes beyond today and beyond the boxes – we hope it extends to all the ministries of this church and all the love you show out in the world. Stewardship is a way of living our entire lives in gratitude to our loving God. It’s not a card once a year or a check once a month or even a weekly offering. All of those responses are simply measurable ways of making our promises, symbolic ways of living our gratitude. Give thanks to the Lord for God is good. In truth we are saying, like the Israelites in Joshua’s time – we will serve the Lord of love. We choose this day and every day for the rest of our lives, to reflect God’s love as shown in Jesus Christ.

Of course, this is not the first time you have made that choice to serve and to love. You have chosen in many ways throughout your lives to serve God. Today we honor veterans who have answered the most noble call to service. That is just one way to serve - all of us have had many chances to choose God. Perhaps you were baptized. Perhaps you were confirmed. Perhaps you were ordained to an office in the church. Perhaps you have served God in a variety of ways here and out in the world. Each time, you were given a choice, and you decided to follow Jesus in the way of love. Every year on Stewardship Sunday we ask you to renew your promises. At other times during the year, we remind ourselves to serve God and we are given opportunities to share God’s love. Every single Sunday you decide whether you will come to church and how you will serve God. Every single morning you awake to a million new choices. How will you reflect God’s love today? How will you give thanks to God? How will you remember Jesus’ love for you? How will you live in the gifts of God’s Spirit and share as you are able? Every single day in a million different ways, you are asked to choose. Choose this day how you will love. How you will respond to God’s love. How you will serve God and give glory to God. And every single day in a million ways, you choose.

In the reading for today, Joshua was about to die and he wanted to challenge his people to continue following the God who had blessed them. That’s what we are doing here today. Of course, I am not about to die. Nor am I anywhere as holy as Joshua. But the idea of Stewardship Sunday is the same. Joshua starts by reminding the people of their history with God. That was in the first 13 verses we didn’t read today. Joshua repeats the history of Israel and all of God’s blessings - from Abraham’s father all the way down to that very morning. Just like the Psalm for today that starts with creation, then moves to the Exodus. We retell the story of how God has been so very faithful to us, so very loving to us, so graceful and gracious and generous, so persistent and consistent. Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good. God’s steadfast love endures forever.

If we did the same thing right now – what would that look like? In fact, I’ve made it easy for you. There is an insert to the bulletin. It follows the pattern of Psalm 136 tracing the ways God has blessed you. I invite you to add your lines to the Psalm of praise. Reflect on all the ways God has blessed you and your family, all the ways God has shown love to the world, all the ways God is calling us to respond. If you like what you have written, you may turn it in at the end of the service. Or if you want more time, you can bring it back and turn it in next week. Or you don’t have to turn it in, just give it to God as an offering of Thanksgiving. Let us see where God leads us to love in the year ahead.

Give thanks to the Lord for God is good. God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Give thanks to our God who loves us still. God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Thank God who placed me in a home of love from my birth.

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Thank God who gave me education and experience, friends and purpose.

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Thank God who surrounds me with loving gifted people of faith.

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Thank God who helps us to care and to share and to bless.

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Thank God who has walked with this church for 157 years in Gardner.

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Thank God who will lead us forward in grace as God always has led us before.

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of all of our lives. Who loves us immensely and calls us to serve.

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Amen and amen. Let us continue to give thanks to God.

Bulletin insert – a Psalm of Thanksgiving.

Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good.

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Give thanks to the Lord who loves each of us.

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

List the ways God has blessed you. Remember God’s love for you.

Finish the sentence: (write as many lines as you wish to write.)

Give thanks to God who…

November 12, 2023 – Stewardship Sunday

Joshua 24:14-18

“Now, therefore, revere the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living, but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went and among all the peoples through whom we passed, and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”

Psalm 136:1-9

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,

for his steadfast love endures forever.

O give thanks to the God of gods,

for his steadfast love endures forever.

O give thanks to the Lord of lords,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

who alone does great wonders,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

who by understanding made the heavens,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

who spread out the earth on the waters,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

who made the great lights,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

the sun to rule over the day,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

the moon and stars to rule over the night,

for his steadfast love endures forever.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.