

Our Hymn of Grateful Praise: Small Groups Resources

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A (November 12, 2023) – Our Hymn of Grateful Praise: Enter the Gates

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). Divide the group into pairs or groups of three. Ask, “What are you thankful for?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Psalm 100](#).

- What does “Make a joyful noise to the Lord” (Psalm 100:1a) mean to you? How might you make *a joyful noise*?
- *“We are called to worship the Lord with gladness. But the word translated as worship does not mean a worship service; it means **a worship-centered life**. Yes, what we do in the hour we gather with the body in the sanctuary of the church matters, and we ought to do it with as much gratitude and joy as we can muster. But to “worship the Lord with gladness” is **what we do in our homes and places of work, in our neighborhoods, and on our playgrounds**. We live out the worship of God by giving thanks anywhere and everywhere we can. As noisily as possible.”* (November 12, Preaching Notes)
- Every morning, Amy Kawahara, ninety-four years old, opens her eyes and thanks God for another day to live. She knows she belongs to God. She reads devotion, prays, and seeks ways to share joy. She sings in the choir to make a joyful noise to the Lord. She leads a prayer group and senior exercise ministry. In every way, she worships the Lord with gladness.
 - o How might you “worship the Lord with gladness” in your home, work, and neighborhood?
- *“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”* (Psalm 100:3). Hard things happen in our lives. Sometimes, we do not feel that we can make a joyful noise to the Lord because of our hardship. Have you felt it was hard to give thanks to God? How could you feel you belong to God no matter what is happening around you?
- *“For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations”* (Psalm 100:5). How do you feel about knowing that generations after you will receive God’s steadfast love and faithfulness, even after you are gone? How could you express more joy and thanksgiving in your life?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious and Loving God, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude and joy, just as Psalm 100 teaches us. We thank you for being our Creator and Shepherd, guiding and caring for us. Help us to enter your presence with thanksgiving and praise, recognizing your goodness, love, and faithfulness. May we live out the lessons of this psalm in our daily lives, sharing your love and joy with those around us. Amen.

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A (November 19, 2023) – Our Hymn of Grateful Praise: In Everything

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, ask participants, “Briefly describe your favorite Thanksgiving Day from your past.”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Philippians 4:4-13](#).

- *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice”* (Philippians 4:4). Who comes to your mind when you hear “rejoice”? Why do you think the person acts that way? What might you learn from the person?
- *“This is not to say, even here on the threshold of Thanksgiving, that there isn’t room for grief or sadness. Suffering strikes even during the holiday season. Some might be dreading gathering with family, knowing there is pain there... We don’t ask to accept the brokenness or endure abuse, but note that we see beyond the pain of the moment to a wholeness that is offered. We give thanks for the promises of God, even when we can’t feel them at the moment”* (Nov. 19 Planning Worship).
 - o How have you experienced this? Can you think of someone who needs to hear those words? How might you reach out to them?
- *“Joy, says Paul, is revealed in gentleness, in how we treat those around us, in how we respond to slights against us, and in how we reach out to those who are hurt. “Let your gentleness be known to everyone,” says Paul. **Let it show. Joy is found in the knowledge and experience of the nearness of God** (The Lord is near), a nearness that diminishes anxiety and brings out a willingness to connect with God with gratitude and with hope (in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God). Joy is found in that communion, that peaceful confidence that comes from living in Christ”* (Nov. 19 Preaching Notes).
 - o What would it look like to live this way?
- *“I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances, I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need”* (Philippians 4:12). “Approximately 842 million people are estimated to be suffering from food insecurity or chronic hunger, regularly not getting enough nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (<https://umcmmission.org/advance-project/982920/>). “More

than 34 million people in the US face hunger, including 1 in 9 children”

(<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america>).

- As you prepare for the Thanksgiving feast, how could you and your church give thanks to God by helping those who are hungry?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, we give thanks for your many blessings in our lives. We rejoice in You always, finding our joy in the Lord. We pray that your peace, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds as we bring our anxieties to You. In Thanksgiving week, help us cultivate a spirit of thankfulness in our daily lives and express our gratitude not only in words but also in our actions. Amen.

Christ the King / Reign of Christ Sunday, Year A (November 26, 2023) – Our Hymn of Grateful Praise: After Giving Thanks

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, ask participants, “What is your favorite liturgical (church-related) day/holiday of the year?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [John 6:5-23](#).

- This is the famous story of the feeding of the five thousand. Since women and children were not counted in Jesus' time, there may have been more than ten thousand people present. What does the scripture say the boy had to offer before Jesus blessed the food? [“Five barley loaves and two fish” (John 6:9b)]
 - I attended the World Council of Churches’ stewardship program (Christian leadership) some years ago and spent three weeks with other young adults from all over the world. One night, we were so hungry that we decided to bring whatever we had from each room. I brought my rice cookies (senbei), and others brought many different kinds of food to the round table. Some of the food I had never seen in my life. After we blessed the food and thanked God for the food and friends, each of us explained what food we had brought to share. It was one of the moments I was fed spiritually, emotionally, and physically. I wondered if people felt that way when Jesus fed the five thousand.
 - Have you had an experience in which you did not think there was enough, but plenty was available? If you have, where did you see God in the situation?
- As Jesus was walking on the sea, he said, “It is I; do not be afraid” (John 6:20) because his disciples were so terrified. In the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, “Do not be afraid” appears eighty times, and “fear not” appears 169 times. God is telling us not to be afraid.
 - In what area of your life/ministry do you not want to be afraid?

- “The people were hanging out in the place where it happened. The miracle place. But John doesn’t call it a miracle place. He says that **it is the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks**. Think about it. That’s what John wants us to remember: that this meal, **this miracle, happened after gratitude was expressed**. Gratitude for the abundance that didn’t look like abundance. Gratitude for the satisfaction that came out of hunger. Gratitude becomes a way of seeing and a way of being in the world. We give thanks to God for what is about to happen. We give thanks for what we might not yet see, but what we trust God will provide.” (Preaching Notes – Nov. 26)
 - For what do you want to give thanks to God?
 - Do you need to work on giving thanks more?

- This is the last Sunday of the liturgical year (church calendar). The first day of Advent (next Sunday) is the beginning of the next liturgical year. Reflect on this liturgical year (from November 27, 2022, until today).
 - Have you grown closer to Jesus?
 - What did you do so that you could be closer to Jesus? (attended worship more often, helped with church ministries, prayed, meditated, read the Bible, participated/led small-group/Bible study)
 - Are there things you want to do as you prepare for the next liturgical year to become a more mature disciple?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, thank you for feeding us spiritually, physically, and emotionally. As was the case in today’s scripture, sometimes we question how you can feed the hungry or walk on water. Forgive us, we pray. Help us to trust you and give thanks to you. On this last Sunday of the liturgical year, continue to use us as instruments of peace in the year to come. Amen.

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