

**First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan**  
***Summer in the Psalms: Psalm 103, A Psalm of David***  
***“Thanksgiving for God’s Goodness”***

**Sunday, August 30, 2020**  
**Rev. Emily Campbell**

**Rev. Emily Campbell – Announcements and Opening Prayer**

Good morning! Welcome to worship at First Presbyterian. Today is August 30<sup>th</sup>. My name is the Reverend Emily Campbell. I am delighted that you are here today because we have a special service in store for you. I do have a couple of announcements to share with you before our service begins.

First, as we inch closer to the end of summer we want to join together as a congregation in a time of fellowship that is both safe and uplifting. Many of you know that during the Fridays throughout the summer we have been holding mission collections, I have to say, with great success, thanks to this congregation's amazing generosity. Well this coming Friday, September 4<sup>th</sup>, we do want to do another special drive-by collection. Between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., Friday, September 4<sup>th</sup>, we're hoping you will drive by the church parking lot, but rather than dropping off a mission donation, we're hoping to present you with a special gift on that day. Our fabulous deacons will be here and they have ordered for your benefit “Our Daily Bread” devotional which will take you through to the end of this calendar year. We hope that this is just a boost to you, wherever you are in your spiritual walk and a reminder that God is present with you always. Additionally, our members of our worship committee will be handing you a card which will be a “Psalm Challenge”. I am going to speak more about what that means later in our service today. But perhaps the greatest of all is that our children will be out on Friday, September 4, as well, and they will be helping to hand out ice cream sandwiches to our congregation, to our members and friends of our congregation, so we can share the time of fellowship. You have the option of just picking up and going, or if you would like to bring a lawn chair, we'll sit out in our parking lot, in safe social distances, and we will have a chance to catch up between 11:00 and 3:00 next Friday. We hope to see you there.

Friends, I'm hoping you can help us with one other special project that we're working on at this time in our church. We're trying to gather all the names of active teachers within our congregation who are either members or frequent visitors of our church, so if you are a teacher or a school administrator or parapro or substitute teacher, please submit your name at our church website. If you *know* of anyone who falls in those categories as a friend or relative, please list those names on our church website. We have something planned that will be revealed in the coming weeks, but you could help us in this way.

Finally, friends I do want to let you know that we are holding the ordination and installation service of our new elders and deacons at the end of our service today. Let us now turn our hearts to God as we turn to God in prayer.

We praise you, dear God, this day for the gift of your power and love. We praise you for the beauty of creation, for your faithfulness, for your forgiveness, for your gift of fellowship. We thank you and offer up our praise and prayers. We recognize, dear God,

that it is by grace alone that you call us into your service. We ask that you please forgive us for the times when we have failed to listen and failed to respond to your call upon our lives. Please forgive us for those times when our personal priorities have taken precedence over your priorities. We thank you for the forgiveness brought to us through the life, death, and resurrection of your son Jesus Christ. We know we do not deserve this gift of grace, but we claim it as our own, as children of God. Please receive our praise in our prayers this morning, we ask in your most precious name. Amen.

In our world today, as we continue to manage the problems related to the Covid pandemic, we all could use encouragement and a reminder of God's love and care. To that end, I want to invite you and your family to join me in taking this Psalm challenge. I mentioned this at the beginning of the service. We have the opportunity next Friday September 4th to come to the church and pick up some challenge cards. There will be Psalm 23 on one side and the Psalm we are studying next week on the other side. We have the opportunity as we read God's word and as we memorize it, we are giving God the opportunity to speak into our problems. I hope you will join me in inviting God into our hearts and minds as we take on this challenge together. Right now, let us give God the opportunity to speak to us as we speak to him. Let us turn to God in prayer. Would you all please pray with me. Dear God, we thank you today for the gift of your Word. We thank you that you speak to us through it. Help us to memorize your Word, help us to share it, help us to live it out in our lives. May it always remind us of your love and care. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Rev. Campbell — Scripture Reading, Psalm 103**

Friends, our scripture reading this morning is Psalm 103, which is a Psalm of David. Let us listen for the word of God speaking to our hearts and minds today.

- 1 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
- 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—
- 3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
- 4 who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- 5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 6 The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.
- 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.
- 8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.
- 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.
- 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.
- 13 As a father has compassion for his children,  
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.
- 14 For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.
- 15 As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field;
- 16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

- 17 But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting  
on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,  
18 to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.
- 19 The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.
- 20 Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
obedient to his spoken word.
- 21 Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will.
- 22 Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion.

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

### **Rev. Campbell – Sermon**

Please pray with me. Bless the Lord Oh my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name. My soul yearns today to understand your word, dear God, and I pray that you would unlock this door for each of us. May your Holy Spirit guide us closer to you and closer to your will for our lives. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Psalm 103 was a late addition to our "Summer in the Psalms" sermon series. It was added just this month after I performed the funeral interment service for Tom Brady, a beloved member of this congregation. I read this Psalm in its entirety at Tom's service because this Psalm was a favorite of Tom's. He had a deep appreciation for the words and often would reflect on its meaning. What I learned through my own study of this particular Psalm is that it is a comprehensive view of who God is and how God acts in our lives. I say that to you with confidence today, because the way in which the psalmist actually wrote the Psalm tells us that this is meant to be a comprehensive view on a subject. I know this, and biblical scholars know this, because there are exactly 22 verses in this Psalm. At the same time, there are 22 characters in the Hebrew Bible. Whenever that pattern is used within scripture, and it is found more than once in the Psalms, it is a sign that a complete view on a topic is about to be taught to us.

So, what is the Psalm trying to teach us today? Well the psalmist is trying to teach us that the power of God transforms our lives and every aspect of it. Our birth, our death, and every experience in between is transformed by the power of the love of God at work in our lives. The psalmist begins with these words, "Praise the Lord, my soul, and all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul and forget not all his benefits" This Psalm is actually bookended by praise. It begins with those words and ends with, "Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, praise the Lord, all ye heavenly hosts. Praise the Lord, all his works". This call to praise repeatedly comes from this deeper understanding of God's love transforming our lives.

How is God at work? Well, we are called to remember and recite this transformative power as we praise God who forgives all our sins. As it says in verse three, "who heals all our diseases, who redeems life from the pit"; in verse four, "who crowns us with love and compassion, who satisfies our desires with good things"; and verse 5, "so that our youth is renewed like the eagle's". These are the benefits of God's transformative power. This is a call to not forget how God works in our lives. When we remember the loving care and transformative power of God, we are strengthened in our lives of faith. It is as if we have allowed God to speak into our experiences of darkness, transforming even these experiences by His Word.

Contemporary pastor and Christian author Tim Keller has written that so much of our fear, so much of our anger, and anxiety, and discouragement comes from us simply forgetting the benefits of God. This is why we are called to meditate on these benefits, remember them, and recite them. In verses 8 through 13, the Psalm is focused on how we can recount God's transformative power in our lives, as we can see that power transforming our sin into experiences of grace. Scholars have said that these verses 8 through 13 are some of the greatest reflections of love and grace found anywhere in scripture. Listen to these words: "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor harbor his anger forever. He does not treat us as our sins deserve, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he has removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him".

This text comes originally out of the Old Testament book of Exodus, chapter 34, verse 6. This is where David remembers God's treatment of his children after they created the golden calf. God is slow to anger and abounding in love, even then, and as God's children today, we are called to emulate this same kind of slow anger. And in this abundance of love, we are reminded further in Psalm 103 that God not only transforms our sins into occasions of grace, but God transforms our frailty into strength in God. It says, beginning in verse 14, "He knows how we are formed; he remembers we are dust. The life of the mortals is like grass; they flourish like the flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place is remembered no more. But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him; his righteousness to their children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts."

Friends, it is true that we are afraid; our lives can pass away too quickly. But God remembers us and His love holds us not only in this life, but into eternity. The faithfulness and grace that transforms our death into an occasion of praise, that is what is on offer to each of us. This is why our depths can become even an occasion of praise, because within it we see God's transformative power at work. In those moments our voices join those of the angels in the whole of creation crying, "Praise the Lord, Oh my soul"!

Friends we could spend the whole of our lives plumbing the depths of the transformative love of God. Even if we devoted every waking moment to that pursuit, we would never get to the end of it. As the Apostle Paul wrote in the book of Ephesians, "I pray that you would grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God". We are called to remember God's love, we are called to recall it; to recite it. We are called to share it. And in our own experiences of darkness, we are called to return to it, to remember God's benefits for us. For in the end, as we do this, our lives themselves are transformed into occasions of praise. Thanks be to God for his gift of grace. Amen.

### **Rev. Campbell – Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders**

Today, we are delighted that we are able to ordain and install new nine elders and six deacons. A typical class of elders is seven elders. We have two extra because Sandy Dodge is willing to serve as our Session Clerk and Heather Balog Kirkland is serving a one-year term to fill in for someone who had to step away due to work reasons. With that in mind we proceed with joy today to ordain and install our nine elders and six deacons. Listen to these words:

*There are a variety of gifts, but it is the same Spirit who gives them. There are different ways of serving God, but it is the same Lord who is served. God works through each person in a unique way, but it is God's purpose that is accomplished. To each is given a gift of the Spirit, to be used for the common good. Together we are the body of Christ and, individually, members of it. We are called into the Church of Jesus Christ by baptism. We are marked as Christ's own, owned by the Holy Spirit. This is our common calling, to be disciples and servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. Within this community of the church some are called to particular service as deacons, elders, as ministers of word and sacrament. Ordination is Christ's gift to the church, assuring that his ministry continues among us, providing for ministries of caring and compassion in the world, ordering the governance of the church, and preaching the Word and administering the sacraments.*

The following are installed as elders: Ailsa Blunk, Dan Cronin, Sandy Dodge, Doug Kee, Heather Balog-Kirkland, Tom Little, Val McKinley, Joyce Sullivan and Tom Weaver. Being installed to the office of deacon are Frank Benages, Marilyn Bingamen, Nancy Downs, Sandy Marulis, Jon Meldrum and Dennis Neubacher.

[At this point, questions were asked of the candidates and they gave their answers]

The next two questions are for our congregation as a whole and so I invite you the members of First Presbyterian Church Plymouth to answer these questions:

Do we, the members of First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, accept Ailsa Blunk, Dan Cronin, Sandy Dodge, Doug Kee, Heather Balog-Kirkland, Tom Little, Val McKinley, Joyce Sullivan and Tom Weaver as elders, and do we accept Frank Benages, Marilyn Bingamen, Nancy Downs, Sandy Marulis, Jon Meldrum and Dennis Neubacher as deacons chosen by God through the voice of the congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ?

[Congregation members answered from home, "We do" ]

The second question:

As congregation members do we agree to encourage this new group of elders and deacons, to respect their decisions, to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is the head of the church?

[Congregation members answered from home, "We do" ]

Let us now turn our thoughts towards God, as we pray now for our new elders and deacons. Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we thank you and praise you for the men and women that you have called into service within our church. We thank you that you have called them for such a time as this and we ask your blessing would be poured out upon each of our new elders and deacons today. Bless not only them, but their respective ministries, we pray. Bless their family members and all who support them. We ask that your Holy Spirit inspire, equip, and enliven each of these willing disciples, so that they may have vision, love, compassion, and kindness to carry out your will in our church and in the wider world. We do pray today for our world. Lord, we are tired and weary of adjusting our lives within this global pandemic. Strengthen us, we pray. We do thank you for your faithfulness to us through our every emotion and in our every experience of need. We pray today, remembering anyone who is sick and in need of healing. We pray for their medical care and their emotional support. We pray also for those at work or at school, fearful for their health, be it their physical, emotional, spiritual or financial health. Lord, please grant us your help and your peace. Teach us to delight in your loving care and find

comfort in your abiding presence. This we pray in your name, remembering that you first taught your disciples to pray together, saying:

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, now and forever. Amen.

Friends, let us go from here today praising God, remembering his love and abiding care. Let us go from here echoing the praise of the angels in the whole of creation as we go. May the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon you and upon all those whom you love, this day and forever more. Amen.