

Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational Church of Clinton

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Thanksgiving Flows from Experienced Grace

Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth
Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing
Enter His gates with thanksgiving, *And* His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him; bless His name.
For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting,
And His faithfulness to all generations

Psalm 100:1-2, 4-5 (NAS)



Rev. Gary Kiontke

Psalm 100 does have an inspired title: a psalm for thanksgiving. The same word also means praise. The faithful Israelites simultaneously directed praise and thanksgiving to their covenant God, Yahweh, in their Temple worship. They declared together all His wonderful attributes and His great and powerful deeds done for them, especially in their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Two things Christians can learn from this. First, the best worship of God is community or corporate worship. This is hard for modern Americans who often put the individual above the community. The other is that worship is primarily focused on God's attributes which are too many to mention. A small and incomplete list is: steadfast and faithful love, truth, mercy, justice, grace, power and compassion. These attributes all flow into wonderful deeds, including miracles, done for people. Here is another short list: forgiveness, adoption as His children with renewed life, an ongoing sense of His presence, strength for every circumstance and protection in danger.

The psalm of thanksgiving is a series of commands to "all the earth," meaning all people on earth. First, all people are to shout triumphantly to the covenant God and Creator of the universe for joy in who He is and what He does. Then they must serve Him with gladness for what He has done for them. Next, they must come into His very presence with loud, ringing singing. They must enter His outer gates with thanksgiving for what He has done, before coming closer in His courts with praise for who He is. The last two commands are that they must be thankful to Him for who He is; and, finally they must bless His Name.

But, the best comes last. The inspired songwriter gives three excellent reasons why these commands are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). First the covenant God is good. Next, His steadfast love lasts throughout eternity. And third, His truth lasts for generation after generation. At the core of everything is the love of God as personified in Christ which surpasses knowing by people (Ephesians 3:14-21). To know this love and to live in it is the greatest joy in the world. One of my favorite articles I wrote was about enjoying God's love, with the title "A Three-Fold Relationship with the Triune God" in the September 2020 issue.

A great gift of God is *shalom*, peace. The apostle Paul commanded Christians in Colosse to submit their hearts to be ruled by God's peace to fulfill their calling to be one Body. He then commanded them to be thankful, but thanksgiving naturally flows from experiencing peace. Then they must let the words of Christ live in them so they can teach and correct each other with singing in their hearts to the Lord. The result of this obedience will be they will do everything in Jesus´ Name, giving thanks to Father God through Him (Colossians 3:15-17).

The apostle Paul thanked God for what He had done for the Christians in the church in Rome. This introductory phrase does not have a verb. The text says: But *charis* to God. *Charis* usually means *grace*; but it carries the meaning of *thanksgiving*. This is a link between grace and thanksgiving. Paul is grateful that people who had once been slaves to sin have now obeyed from their hearts the type of teaching that had been given over to them (Romans 6:17).

Paul told the church in Philippi, that had always faithfully partnered with him to support his work in many places, how they should pray. It is no surprise that thanksgiving should be part of their prayer. He began with a command of admonition, "You all must be careful for nothing" using the same word Jesus used in His parable of the soils where He said seed (continued on page 2 …)

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Thanksgiving Flows from Experienced Grace

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falling among thorns is choked from bearing perfect fruit because "it is … choked … by the cares of living" (Luke 8:9-15). Instead, in every situation in prayer and supplication, accompanied with thanksgiving, they must make their requests known to God; and the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7). What a comfort to know that when people with stressed hearts can pray with thanksgiving, they are promised God's peace!

The longest psalm in the Bible, written by an anonymous and pious priest, contains this poetic promise to God, which should be a model to all godly people: "At midnight, I will rise to give thanks to Thee on account of Thy righteous ordinances" (Psalm 119:162). Here is someone who understands that all the instruction, guidelines and commandments God has given people are for their benefit so they can live life to the full. A full life has assurance of forgiveness and acceptance from God. Those who live by faith can also enjoy God's love, joy and peace (Galatians 5:2-23). And, the greatest joy is in bearing fruit with and for God in Jesus (John 15:10-16).

David wrote in a psalm he dedicated to the chief musician: "Blessed (is) Adonai who daily bears our burdens, the God saving us" (Psalm 68:19). Christians believe Adonai is Jesus. Jesus Himself said He is Adonai (Matthew 22:43-45, referencing Psalm 110:1, another David psalm). So, they would say Jesus should be blessed/thanked, because He is their Savior who daily bears the burdens of His people that can happen because of their testimony to Him to others in truth and love.

In Paul's discourse to Christians in Corinth about cheerfully giving to others because God made His grace abound in them so they glorified God with their obedience to the gospel by giving generously is concluded with the greatest reason to thank God: "Thanks (*charis* be) to God because of His indescribable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15)! This indescribable gift is God's Son, Jesus, who took on human flesh and blood to die for all people; then, [by his life] they become children of God and siblings of Him because He destroyed the work of the devil so as to deliver people who lived in fear of death (Hebrews 2:9-15).

All people who have experienced God's grace so they have the assurance of forgiveness and reconciliation to God as His children, can expect to experience His strong love supporting them. This experience of grace from God will result in the child of God thanking God in everything (Ephesians 5:20).

On November 20 I will preach a Thanksgiving sermon from Psalm 30 and Luke 10:21-24. See the article on Sundays in November, below, for more details. ~v_v~

Sundays in November

We will have Communion on November 1 and 15.

We will have our Thanksgiving Dinner on November 15 at noon. See the article on page 4 for more information.

The Thanksgiving sermon explaining why we always thank God will be given on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, November 22.

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes / titles for each of the worship services:

Date	Scripture	Theme / Title
November 1	2 Samuel 5:1-16; Psalm 91	Almighty God's presence empowers people to do the impossible Remaining in the shelter of the Almighty guarantees deliverance
November 8	2 Samuel 5:17-6:11; Psalm 27:1-6	Inquiring of Yahweh gives blessing not disappointment Those who are saved by Yahweh may ask for and know joy
November 15	2 Samuel 6:12-7:3; Psalm 132:4-13	David rejoices as the Ark of Yahweh is brought to Jerusalem Yahweh's presence rests on His Ark in a special way
November 22	Psalm 30; Luke 10:21-24	Always thank Yahweh for healing, grace, mercy and joy Thank Father God that His Son has revealed Him
November 29	2 Samuel 7:4-28; Psalm 89:20-24, 30-37	Rejoice in God's 'alternative' plan for people Yahweh anoints David from whom will come the eternal King

November 22 is the last Sunday of the Liturgical Church Year, also known as *Christ The King* Sunday. November 29 is the first Sunday of Advent.

It Just Happens… "On Building a Barn ..."*

By Petros

The Bluegrass Gospel Barn, aka BGB, is like a dream becoming a reality. There were a couple turning points where I had to give it back to God, as it was a consuming project that I was willing to let go of if God wasn't behind the build. The first turning point was when my devoted partner's idea of a barn was the size of a shed. There was no point in pursuing the dream of a house of song and dance before God. It would only work if we were both led on the build, so there wasn't any sense in trying to persuade her on what I thought would be a great outreach by the hand of God. However, while visiting a nature preserve, there was a full barn and "*It Just Happens*..." my Love exclaimed that would be a good size barn for us. I couldn't believe what she just said. I wanted to record her confirmation. I asked her to repeat that we could build a "real barn-sized" barn.

We began researching and visiting post-and-beam barns of all kinds from Maine to Connecticut. We even signed a contract and sent an electronic deposit to a builder for a barn at the upper limit of our budget. "*It Just Happens*..." there was a glitch and the payment was never received. I began to have second thoughts about moving forward. The signed contract was dissolved without penalty. "*It Just Happens*..." I met a post-and-beam salesman from Lancaster that quoted me a post-and-beam barn that was well within our budget. It was an exciting time to envision a local builder working on a barn, on the premises. We had site visits by the company owner and surveyor to lay out the scope of the barn build. And then the company owner asked for a ridiculous amount compared to the original conversations. To this day, I'm still baffled by what "*did not happen.*"

"*It Just Happens*..." a volleyball friend mentioned a while back that he could build me a barn. We talked and he gave me drawings that he pencil-sketched, based on what I wanted. He gave me a cost for materials and labor, which was well under my budget, and he included electrician and plumbing work. Also, solar panels that are now costing half as much. "*It Just Happens*..." I took the drawings he pencil-sketched, and applied and received a Building Permit! I could not believe that I had received permission to make a dream come; at a cost without any pressure to commit to. And with pencil drawings that detailed the work, as a builder would need. That was the beginning of building a barn. There are so many more stories, including my volleyball friend contractor overcoming his medical setback. And God providing an even better carpenter to finish the barn.

I'll close with this thought, that in life there are ups and downs, similar to a roller coaster ride. Same happens with the build of a barn. By giving everything to God and doing things for His Glory – the journey is quite a pleasure. He knows what we need and when we need it. There is wisdom in abiding in His time to provide. I have a dilemma that the numbers quote a setback of $4K. I'm putting it on the back burner and know God will provide the right solution. "*It Just Happens*..." we got a "good" quote for plumbing the barn at $18K. The sewer line hooked up before winter was all I wanted. We shook hands on $7K for the sewer line work. But then the cost needed to be increased for a licensed trencher. Then I would need to get the permit instead of the plumber, but he wouldn't give me his license number. I'm getting mixed feelings, and researched that I can legally trench and lay the pipe down. And, find a friend who will connect pipe for $2.5K, but need to wait until Spring '27. I've already started digging and decided we need to find the sewer line and fill in trenches before winter! "It Just Happens*…" I remembered a local plumber, and he only wants $1K! "*It Just Happens*..." I see a metal detector while helping an in-law and ask to use it to find an underground pipe. After many trials, I map out a straight line, indicating ferrous, which I believe is the iron sewer pipe coming from our home, which we needed to tie into from barn. My helper continues the dig, but breaks the line I hung to follow, and goes beyond my line indicator by 3'! He finds the pipe under my original line, 5' below grade. It turns out it is not metal and a broken piece of the same pipe gives no signal at all! If I had been digging, I would have missed the pipe by 3'!!! Seeing the newly "found" pipe is amazing and gives me peace and joy that God is showing us how to build a barn.

PTL!!! ***"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor uselessly." Psalm 127:1***

Author's note: This article's title "It Just Happens*..." counters the cliché … things just don't happen. "It" will stand for the world view one chooses to abide in. Firstly, "Just" reveals that God is behind what most people see as "just circumstances;" and secondly, "Just" is the character of the God who wants to be our God. He has made us in His image – righteous; by faith in God. "Happens" will be the events and experiences God uses to grow our faith. All things work for the glory of God. When we turn from our ways and we look to God and live His Word – His plan for us unfolds. ~v~

Thanksgiving Fellowship Dinner

Sunday, November 15 at Noon

The annual Thanksgiving Fellowship Dinner this year will be on Sunday, November 15 at noon. Sign-up sheets will be available after worship, for three Sundays, from October 25 through November 8.

We hope that all who are able, will gather for both worship and a feast of thanksgiving to God. We all need to be part of thankful worship and fellowship, so make plans to attend November 15.



Advent

Advent begins on Sunday, November 29, 2026.

The December issue of Vestry Voices will have more on Advent.



NOVEMBER 2026

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	2	3	4 (††)	5 (**)	6	7
8 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #2)	9	10	11 (††)	12 (**)	13	14
15 Communion Sunday; Thanksgiving Dinner at Noon (Note #3)	16	17	18 (††)	19 (**)	20	21
22 FCC Worship; Christ The King Sunday; Coffee Hour after worship (Note #4)	23	24	25	26 Thanksgiving Day	27	28
29 FCC Worship; Advent #1 (Note #5)	30 December "Vestry Voices" Articles Due (Note #6)	1	2	3	4	5

Calendar Notes:

#1) 11/1 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**

#2) 11/8 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.** ***ALSO*:** Coffee Hour / Fellowship after Worship *(provided by the women)*.

#3) 11/15 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.** ***ALSO*:** Thanksgiving dinner: ***NOON.***

#4) 11/22 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.** *(Christ The King Sunday.)*

***ALSO*:** Coffee Hour / Fellowship after Worship *(provided by the men)*.

#5) 11/29 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.** *(First Sunday of Advent.)*

#6) 11/30 — Articles are due for the December issue of "Vestry Voices" (for assembly/mail-out on December 1).

(††) Wednesday Bible Study (book of "Job"): **11:00 AM *(but not on 11/25)*** *(in FCC Parlor)*.
(**) Thursday Prayer in Parlor: **3:00 PM *(but not on 11/26)***.

Daylight Savings Time ends at 2:00 AM on Sunday, November 1st -- please don't forget to "Fall Back!"