

An Invitation
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
August 28, 2016

Psalm 112

¹ Praise the LORD!

Happy are those who fear the LORD,
who greatly delight in his commandments.

² Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

³ Wealth and riches are in their houses,
and their righteousness endures for ever.

⁴ They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright;
they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

⁵ It is well with those who deal generously and lend,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

⁶ For the righteous will never be moved;
they will be remembered for ever.

⁷ They are not afraid of evil tidings;
their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD.

⁸ Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

⁹ They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor;
their righteousness endures for ever;
their horn is exalted in honor.

¹⁰ The wicked see it and are angry;
they gnash their teeth and melt away;
the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

The invitations have gone out for our anniversary celebration and you can see that we are working on sprucing up the place with that date in mind. I don't know about you but the surest way to get me to deep clean my house is to invite people over. I suppose I could go the route of those who leave the vacuum by the front door at all times so, when people arrive, especially if people just drop in, they can claim they were just about to vacuum. Or, I've heard tell of others who keep a stash of "get well" cards on their mantle so visitors will assume they're just getting over being sick, explaining away any untidiness. Those approaches don't suit me, though, so you'll find me, and my conscripted family members,

tackling a lengthy chore list any time we are expecting guests. We typically invite people over only if we can offer our best.

Of course, there are those friends who are welcome in even if there is laundry waiting to be folded on the couch and dirty dishes in the sink; those friends who know to watch their step for Lego bricks or who will water the plants you've let wilt. It's with those people that I am comfortable letting them know I actually **live** in my house. There is a level of vulnerability involved in letting people see our homes, and ourselves, in real time, in real life. Although we'll probably still steer them away from the bathroom with the ring around the tub!

And then there is the vulnerability which today's final reading from *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers* suggests. Joan S. Gray writes, "Effective spiritual leaders...are able to see weaknesses and lack as an invitation for God to do great things in them and in the church."¹ Gah! When our weaknesses are front and center is often the last time we think to bring another close. But as we have been hearing all summer, that is the best time to invite God in. Indeed, it is how we are meant to be in relationship with God, letting God complete our gaps.

Psalm 112 points to this as it opens: "Happy are those who fear the Lord, who greatly delight in his commandments." If we follow that bread crumb back to the giving of the commandments in Exodus, we remember the first commandment, which reads "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me."² And the commandment which follows says "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them..."³

Happy are those, who in their need, do not put their needs into the hands of the gods of fancy organization systems or trending quick fixes, basically anything in *O* or *Real Simple* magazines! Happy are those, who in their weaknesses, do not idolize the people who appear

¹ Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 120.

² Exodus 20:2-3.

³ Exodus 20:4-5.

on the surface to have it together better than they do or the empty promises of gimmicky exercise plans (I'm looking at you *Ab Roller* and *Shake Weight*). Of course, the weaknesses and lack mentioned by Joan Gray are more intrinsic, like a lack of patience or difficulty remembering to look for another side to a story. Then, we bow down to the god of unrealistic expectations and we worship the idol of "the one right way." Happy are we who, in our impatience, ask God to give us a measure of patience when we are least inclined. Happy are we who, in our certainty that our way is best, ask God to open our eyes to another's perspective, another's circumstances.

Each Sunday morning, I invite each of us, myself included, to "welcome the God-who-is-already-here into our hearts and minds as we prepare ourselves for worship." This is one way we invite God in and make room for God to transform, use, and improve what we lack. Even in the days when every last person wore Sunday finery, while from the outside they looked flawless – especially the kids who, just before walking in, got a licked parental thumb to the smudges on their faces or whole parental hands across their heads to tame their cowlicks – I think you would be hard-pressed to find someone who **felt** flawless. We come before God aware, sometimes acutely so, of weakness and lack – some weeks the prayer of confession hits particularly close to the bone. And we, who stand up here, hope what happens in here (sanctuary) sticks in here (inside of each of us) all week long. That means the passing of the peace, the prayer of confession and, of course, the assurance of pardon remain with you through your week, the encouragement and the challenges remain with you through your week. And most of all? The willingness to welcome the God-who-is-already-with-you into your heart and mind, and especially in times of lack.

We began this summer talking about the differences between being a rowboat church and a sailboat church, a rowboat follower of Christ and a sailboat follower of Christ. And we come full circle today. If we go about our lives focused on using what we have, if we pick up our oars and start rowing to a presumed destination, we proclaim there's no need for God, no place for God. If, on the other hand, we take what we have and bring it together with what God provides, if we drop our sails and invite God to fill them, then we are inviting God to provide what we lack, we are asking God to help us chart the course. When we can

do this, when we let God in even though the windows have dog-nose art and there's a sock in the middle of the floor and there are dust bunnies like tumbleweeds, we welcome God to do great things. When we're not pretending or imagining we've got everything under control, we open ourselves to God doing great things in us. When we, together, admit we know the future about as well as a forecaster knows the weather 15 days out, we can become okay with the not-knowing because we trust that God who **does** know can do great things in the church which we cannot yet begin to imagine.

As we begin to celebrate this 170th year, we recognize that those ten folks who began the First Presbyterian Church of Prairieville could never have imagined the church seventeen decades later, could not have predicted the changes this building and its people have seen. Nonetheless God led them into the future, using what they brought and adding to what they lacked so that **we** might be part of God's working in the world here today. In this time, we certainly celebrate what we have and, I suggest, instead of being ashamed or saddened by what we perceive we lack, we can celebrate that, too, for surely God is present in that lack as much as in what we have. Friends, let us welcome the God who is already here, wholly inside of us, in our plenty **and** in our want. So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: Welcome, God. We're glad you're here. Join with us, we pray. Amen.