



# Order of Worship ☸ Church of the Isles

## November 22, 2020

To watch online:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLr2Jw1WThmmS95p2yBrrnkP4liBLSmcm>

Prelude “Come, Ye Thankful People, Come”  
Shirley Hand

Welcome, Announcements, Prayers  
Shelly Wilson

Welcome to all, no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey. Masks on and distancing, please. Hand sanitizer is available. Online worship will continue in some form in the coming weeks.

Call to Worship  
Linda Smith & All

One: Come, let us celebrate the wondrous gifts that God has given us.

**ALL: Throughout all our lives, God has blessed us with love and hope.**

One: Praise be to God who provides for us.

**ALL: May our hearts be truly grateful, and may we show our gratitude by the ways in which we live and care for others.**

### OPENING PRAYER

Bounteous God, you have lavished your finest gifts on each one of us. We thank you for the many ways you have blessed our lives--with love, hope, friends, our church, and so many other things we cherish. Help us be a blessing for others. Give us hearts of courage and confidence to step out into the world in service, bringing hope where there is doubt, peace where there is strife, love where there is discord. Amen.



## Time for Children

Mindy Picardo

### Reading “The Kinship of Gratitude” by Mark Nepo

Leslie Notaro

The goal of all experience is to remove whatever might keep us from being whole. The things we learn through love and pain reduce our walls and bring our inner and outer life together, and all the while the friction of being alive erodes whatever impediments remain.

But the simplest and deepest way to make who we are at one with the world is through the kinship of gratitude. Nothing brings the worlds of spirit and earth together more quickly. To be grateful means giving thanks for more than just the things we want, but also for the things that surmount our pride and stubbornness. Sometimes the things I’ve wanted and worked for, if I actually received them, would have crushed me.

Sometimes just giving thanks for the mystery of it all brings everything and everyone closer, the way suction pulls streams of water together. So, take a chance and openly give thanks, even if you’re not sure what for, and feel the plenitude of all that is living brush up against your heart.

### Musical Meditation/Prayers of the People “We Gather Together”

Shirley Hand

### Scripture Readings

Ezekiel 34:11-16 & Matthew 25:31-45

Valerie Courtney

**Ezekiel 34:11-16:** For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. <sup>12</sup>As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of cloud and shadow. <sup>13</sup>I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains, in the ravines, and in all the settlements in the land. <sup>14</sup>I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture. <sup>15</sup>I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the



Sovereign LORD. <sup>16</sup>I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

**Matthew 25:31-45** When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty with all the angels, the Son of Man will take his place on the glorious throne. Then all the nations will be gathered for sorting, as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to the right and goats to the left. "Then the One will say to those on the right, 'Enter, you who are blessed! Take what's coming to you in this realm. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'What are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the One will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me - you did it to me.'" Then turning to the goats, the One will say, "And you... I was hungry and you gave me no meal, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was homeless and you gave me no bed, I was shivering and you gave me no clothes, sick and in prison, and you never visited.' Then those 'goats' are going to say, 'What are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn't help?' They will hear the answer: 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me - you failed to do it to me.'

## Sermon “Thankful in the Day of Cloud and Shadow” Shelly Wilson

In many Christian traditions, this last Sunday in the church's liturgical year is known as "Christ the King" Sunday or "The Reign of Christ." It is sort of the "New Year's Eve" of the church calendar before we kick off the new church year with Advent and Christmas. It seems surreal that we could be on the edge of Advent; that next week is Thanksgiving Day. It seems like a blink and like also an eternity since we had "normal" Thanksgiving last year, whatever that may have meant for you. Maybe last year wasn't that normal for you, either. But it was, it's safe to assume, pretty different from what this year's holiday will be like. What I do celebrate about these markers in time is that they help to orient us in spirit—to remind us that life is a cycle, and that we move in Advent through the paradox of the season of deep and longest nights and into the season of incubation and re-creation. But before we move to that beginning, we are here—



trying to figure out what it feels like to read Scripture and honor a Sunday that is meant to be the day when we sing “We Gather Together” even though we can’t and “Come, Ye Thankful People, Come” even though we won’t be going anywhere maybe. What does it look like to give thanks with grateful hearts in this time of pain and loss and anxiety abounding?

The words to this contemporary Christian song played in my mind while I was writing this sermon. “Give thanks with a grateful heart...give thanks to the Holy One...” It seems simple, even simplistic, straightforward—give thanks with a grateful heart...but what does that mean, really...to have a grateful heart? Gratitude...what are you grateful for, this Thanksgiving? How hard is it for you to get to Thanksgiving this year? Has the way to gratitude been clearer, in years before?

Oddly, I’ve been pondering prepositions of late...how much I love using them because they *connect* persons, places, and things...how well suited they are to Thanksgiving. When you are able to... who will you celebrate with? Who do you say thank you to...What are you learning to give thanks for, in, through, because, in spite of, against? Yeah, I know, we aren’t supposed to end sentences with prepositions, but what if they aren’t ending? What if these acts, attitudes of gratitude, in the time of Covid and injustice and upheaval and uncertainty is to learn how to connect pain and blessing, sorrow and joy, life and death and life recreated, to live thanks anew in us, every day, no matter what, in spite of, in the midst of, or afterward, to keep hope alive, because...

This year it will not be easy to get to...living thanks in the day of clouds and shadow...you and I may wonder how to...say thank you...You and I may remember what helped, who sustained us in seasons before when the long nights obscured the light of healing. I am working on relaxing my heart and spirit and reducing my resistance to what is, in the faith that my acceptance will allow me to center in Spirit and to be present. I am learning again to pray Alanis Morissette’s provocative song that says, strangely, “thank you terror, thank you disillusionment, that you frailty, thank you consequence, thank you, thank you, silence...” Yes, thank you. I just couldn’t have learned to...without you...and then I am learning again to innumerate the recognizable blessings, too: thank you running water, thank you clean clothes and thank you



insight and thank you digestion and thank you grace offered and thank you messes to clean up and ways to be useful and thank you forgiveness. And thank you recovery and thank you close calls, and thank you holy moments at sunset and thank you animals and fishes and water and plants and breathing and death that often heals, and thank you birds and music and others' smiles. Especially thank you today. And thank you work and thank you generous and thank you old age and thank you time passing and thank you children and thank you the chance for me or you or God to try it again.

The Ezekiel reading says that God the good shepherd leads the scattered flock through the mountains and the ravines, that we are not alone, even now, in what the reading calls, "the day of clouds and shadow." The assurance of this Scripture is that we may trust the Holy One who guides in the shadows of darkest night and who discerns what is right and true for those most vulnerable. That, in the words of John Wesley, "best of all, God is with us." And this call to hope and to gratitude even in the day of cloud and shadows is the story we will see continued in those messages of Advent and Christmas—that the one who becomes God-with-us, is the incarnated One whose life and work are marked by compassion and justice for the most vulnerable, and not for the richest and most powerful.

The 25th Chapter of Matthew, from which our second reading for today is taken, moves that assurance of the comforting presence of God the shepherd to the next right place beyond gratitude and that is toward the expectation that, as God's flock, we are called to right living, as God's flock, called to love and shelter one another as we have been guided through the longest nights of the soul ourselves.

This passage is about ultimate questions, like, "In the day of cloud and shadows and in the day of sunshine and blessings, how shall we live? When we see the hungry do we feed them; cold and shivering, do we offer clothes; sick and in prison, do we care? What is the ethos of our family, our community, our church, our nation? What does it mean to be thankful in the day of cloud and shadows?" How congruent are our souls with our behaviors, our public policy? Do we recognize the identity of divinity within each hungry, sick, poor, imprisoned, marginalized one among us? If we've done it for the least of these, we've done it for God, says the story. The



Scriptures generally and Jesus in particular are certainly united in the clarion call for support and caring via public and private means, for those vulnerable and at the margins of society. We are to love as God loves and if our values are God-values, then those most vulnerable are lifted up and brought from the margins to the center of the nation's life. That is the measure of our devotion. Just two months before he was assassinated, MLK was preaching at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta and he spoke of how he would like to be remembered...he said, If Christ is king, then my Nobel Prize is less important than my trying to feed the hungry. If Christ is King, then my invitations to the White House are less important than that I visited those in prison. If Christ is King, then my being Time magazine's man of the year is less important than that I tried to love extravagantly, dangerously, with all my being..." Living gratitude...

One night as a man was walking down the street he was suddenly robbed, beaten, dragged into an alley, and left for dead. As he was lying bleeding on the ground, he looked up into the dim amber light in the alley and saw the face of another looking at him. He felt the touch of someone's hands lifting his shoulder. At that moment, he lost consciousness. In the hospital, when he regained consciousness, he remembered the face in the alley and asked, "Is the one who helped me here? I want to speak to him." "Yes," the nurse answered, "He is here and has been waiting to see you." When the man walked into the room, the one who was injured said, "I want to thank you for helping me in the alley this evening and I want to tell you something. When I looked up into that dim light and saw your face, I thought you were Jesus." The man smiled and said, "When I heard your voice calling for help, I thought **you** were Jesus."

I think that is how we find our way to gratitude this hard year of clouds and shadow-- to love the world, to love ourselves and our life, to know that we honor the One when we care for the many, and when we stop in awe of the extravagant beauty deep within life itself. Acknowledging the pain and all we have lost this year, yet and still, may we open ourselves to the blessings and offer thanks with a grateful heart. Amen.



## Benediction

### Postlude “Now Thank We All Our God”

Shirley Hand

#### Prayer concerns

- ❖ Mel Lee, still awaiting knee surgery, just cancelled because of upticks in Covid numbers in Connecticut
- ❖ Elizabeth Snedeker, shingles
- ❖ Shirley Hand, recovering from a fall
- ❖ Claire Holmes, back injury
- ❖ Jan Kreuger, recovering from Covid
- ❖ Diane Guthrie, recovering from cancer surgery; undergoing treatments
- ❖ Susan Arnholdt, Diane G.’s cousin, critically injured in cycling accident
- ❖ Guy Hawkins, health concerns
- ❖ Marla B.’s sister Ruth, health concerns
- ❖ All traveling for the holidays
- ❖ Church members having scans, tests, awaiting surgeries
- ❖ All those grieving losses of loved ones from COVID, other illnesses, accidents, racism, and violence
- ❖ Our nation and the world

**YOU are invited to “Pie in the Garden”** at 4:00 pm on Thanksgiving Day. We will set up card tables and social distance as best we can. If you would like to join us, please call the office (727-595-1038) and leave a message about how many will be coming. Also let us know if you can bring a pie to share. If you would like to join but need a ride, call Marty (727-249-3011). Hope to see you on the 26<sup>th</sup>! **STAY SAFE! Have a blessed Thanksgiving!**

**Grace Connection Congregation is now meeting in our chapel at 11:00 AM Sundays!** This newly formed congregation was looking for a place to meet and we are blessed to have them in our building! We look forward to working with them on outreach projects and sharing fellowship activities! Welcome, friends!

## OUR MISSIONS THAT HELP OTHERS IN NEED

- ❖ **\*\*To help provide Christmas gifts for the families our church member Hazel Merihew helps through her work with Healthy Start Pinellas (as we did last year):** This ministry is time sensitive, so please respond as soon as possible! Call or contact Hazel and she will help match you with a family whose size and gift needs fit your budget. If you



prefer not to shop, financial gifts are also welcomed. If you can help, contact Hazel directly: Phone: (478) 955 1680 / Email: [Hmerihew@healthystartpinellas.org](mailto:Hmerihew@healthystartpinellas.org)

❖ **To help our teachers, students, and families! We are collecting the following items:**

- **Snacks** for middle and high school students who arrive at school hungry: granola bars, chips in individual bags, cookies in individual packages, etc.
- **Books for preschool children** (for teachers to read-aloud to them) on subjects such as emotions, colors or shapes, pets, family, community helpers, faith, holidays, science (ocean, rocks, dinosaurs, etc.); individual small boxes of crayons, Lysol spray, markers, play doh, stickers & more stickers.
- To say thanks to teachers: **gift cards** for coffee or lunch
- For families with babies: **diapers, wipes**