

**11.24.24 ~ Pentecost 27**  
**“Let Us Praise and Give Thanks!”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Isaiah 55:10-13** <sup>NLT</sup>

<sup>10</sup> “The rain and snow come down from the heavens  
and stay on the ground to water the earth.

They cause the grain to grow,  
producing seed for the farmer  
and bread for the hungry.

<sup>11</sup> It is the same with my word.  
I send it out, and it always produces fruit.

It will accomplish all I want it to,  
and it will prosper everywhere I send it.

<sup>12</sup> You will live in joy and peace.

The mountains and hills will burst into song,  
and the trees of the field will clap their hands!

<sup>13</sup> Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow.

Where nettles grew, myrtles will sprout up.

These events will bring great honor to the Lord’s name;  
they will be an everlasting sign of his power and love.”

**Leader: These Prophetic Words Reassure Us.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**2 Corinthians 9:6-13** <sup>NLT</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. <sup>7</sup> You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.” <sup>8</sup> And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. <sup>9</sup> As the Scriptures say,

“They share freely and give generously to the poor.

Their good deeds will be remembered forever.”

<sup>10</sup> For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

<sup>11</sup> Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. <sup>12</sup> So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.

<sup>13</sup> As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ.

**Leader: These Are Words of Important Instruction.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Abundant God, we come to you this Sunday with early thanksgiving, bringing our gratitude for the freedom to worship you as the Spirit leads us. We thank you for reminding us that you provide all that we need even if we feel scarcity or fear at times. You are a generous Lord and Savior, and we thank you for your son, Jesus. As we study Scriptural principles in your Word, let us draw closer to you in faith that dominates uncertainty. Help us to respond to others' needs generously and willingly. We trust you to provide what we give away and what we need. Please speak to us through your messenger and this message. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Happy early Thanksgiving! This has been a very good week for us as a church in terms of service, fellowship, and planning, yet has also been a challenging health week for some. Thank you for stepping up as intercessors for Patsey and Dot. Isn't that what Thanksgiving is about? Recalling our blessings helps us understand and put into perspective the challenges in life. Perhaps that is a good thing, even if a bit painful. Let us see how God's word could help us to develop a lifetime motivation and culture of gratitude and generosity, both personally and as a church.

We continue with Isaiah 55 where we were reminded of God's covenant of grace. In verses 10-13 for today, we see how the Lord's word accomplishes what he promises. The prophet tells us that God's word is like rain and snow that water the earth and provide abundant vegetation. That vegetation can sprout up overnight much like God's works take root in our fertile hearts and provide ultimate purpose. For us, many times, it is not about creating opportunities of service or having the best "programs," but rather, it is about responding to opportunities God puts before us or deep within us. Listen to those ideas that percolate within you. If it is too big for one person, bring it to the church or to your neighborhood group or school or local support agencies.

God's purpose is fulfilled through his beautiful creation—you! In this passage, the joy of our salvation is illustrated by the trees figuratively clapping their hands in approval! Fertility and growth are symbols of God's transformative power in our lives. Our transformation is not immediate after the rain. It takes time, just like a forest does to develop. Some people are entering a difficult season of loss or memories of loss during the holidays. Much like the cycle of autumn leaves that fall in November, there will be a few gray skies, some sadness, dormancy, rest, reflection, then gradual renewal, curiosity, and a spring bursting of growth. Recent trips allowed me to see farmlands before and after harvest; both were beautiful and rich. Birds were ecstatic in both! Through nature's beauty, we recall that earth will become fertile again after harvest, and the prophet says this is also true in the millennium of Christ's return.

For some in Isaiah's day, particularly the eastern religions, rain was considered a gift from the gods (little g) as a sign of life, rebirth, and fertility. Second Isaiah uses it in this passage as a comparison to illustrate God's great power and revelation. He refers to the exiles and their coming liberation almost as a new Exodus. Joy and peace will abound once again as they leave dancing! This brings them and us hope for abundant and fruitful living. The symbols of the old exodus (the river, chariots, and the people's doubts) are supplanted by new symbols (mountains, hills, and hope) that they will traverse to return home. The singing and clapping are symbols of joy after exile, and examples of new growth after pain:

“<sup>13</sup> Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow. Where nettles grew,

myrtles will sprout up (Isaiah 55:13 <sup>NLT</sup>).” Even the desert will bloom, creating an everlasting sign and memorial to God!

As nature is renewed, so is the repentant, sinful person. Not only Easter, but also Thanksgiving is a chance for rebirth as we enter the Advent season next Sunday. But first during this week, let us recall our gratitude for life itself, our relationships with families and friends, our health, strength, faith, possessions that make life easier, and mostly to share our gratitude for the Savior, Jesus. So let us praise and thank the Lord today and every day!

In recent weeks, we have focused on stewardship of resources, time, and talents. In today’s second passage, the apostle Paul reminds us of two reasons to give to others generously: 1.) the size of the harvest depends on the sowing and the generosity of the Sower, and 2.) God loves the gift of generosity. We can give only what we have received and that means we must be wholly dependent upon God, the one who prepares the harvest and is the giver of all life. God is sufficient even if, in our own efforts, we are not. Paul’s Jerusalem collection was an act of charity to pool the assets of Christ’s believers to meet the needs of the new Corinthian believers. It was to be sacrificial, of the heart, and private, trusting God’s providence. We don’t like the word “charity,” but such giving reaps earthly and eternal rewards. Grace abounds in **every** good work, no matter how big or how small.

This is the culture of generosity and goodwill. The motive of our generosity is righteousness—not of our own seeking but of God’s own stirring within us. Yes, generosity is a spiritual gift not given to everyone, but out of salvation, the ultimate example of God’s generosity (John

3:16), we too can give. A gift reluctantly given has NO joy for the giver or the recipient. A cheerful giver has been commanded even before Jesus or Paul: “<sup>2</sup> “Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give (Exodus 25:2).” The apostle Paul reminds his readers and listeners that they must give cheerfully out of a cleansed and repentant heart, not out of obligation.

What does this have to do with Thanksgiving, an American holiday? Generosity blooms this time of year; many needs are met in abundance but let us ask how and if we can be as thankful for our many blessings throughout the year. If indeed we count our blessings one by one all year long, won't the spirit and gifts of generosity glow with us so that it becomes a daily way of living? Trusting God to provide not only all that we need but all that our family, friends, church, and less fortunate neighbors need. That is the philosophy of our Food Mission—God provides. Come see for yourselves. The next giveaway is the second week of December, and Sandwich team is the first and third Wednesday morning. Thank you to all our many volunteers!

So, let us praise and thank God for the rain, snow, vegetation, fruit, animals, food, water, shelter, people, and abundant harvests in our lives. Let us thank and praise God for our family, friends, our work, our play, our hope, faith, joy, and yes, even despairs because they remind us that we are human and not alone but in God's care. Let us praise and thank God's truth expressed in his Word as encouragement and lastly, let us thank God for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who so generously gives us the most important gift of all—eternal life and salvation! Amen?

Amen!||

**Let us pray.** Generous God, we thank you today and every day for your gift of life and the means to survive and enjoy it. Let us keep our eyes focused on the blessings you provide so that we may share with others our bounty. In this season of busyness, please help us to stay committed to the Gospel of Jesus. Encourage us to be grateful in joy and challenge, and to trust you in all things. Help us to find beauty in all we do, sharing that beauty with others. You bless us and for that we are grateful; help us to bless others in Jesus' name, and we pray, **Amen.**