

11.10.24 ~ Pentecost 25
“Lives Given for Freedom”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 104:1-9 ^{TLB}

¹⁻² I bless the Lord: O Lord my God, how great you are! You are robed with honor and with majesty and light! You stretched out the starry curtain of the heavens, ³ and hollowed out the surface of the earth to form the seas. The clouds are his chariots. He rides upon the wings of the wind. ⁴ The angels are his messengers—his servants of fire!

⁵ You bound the world together so that it would never fall apart. ⁶ You clothed the earth with floods of waters covering up the mountains. ⁷⁻⁸ You spoke, and at the sound of your shout the water collected into its vast ocean beds, and mountains rose and valleys sank to the levels you decreed. ⁹ And then you set a boundary for the seas so that they would never again cover the earth.

Leader: These Words of Beauty Bring Assurance.

All: Thanks be to God!

Mark 10:35-45 ^{NIV}

The Request of James and John

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

³⁷ They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

³⁸ “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

³⁹ “We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Leader: These Are Words of True Commitment.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Decisive and omniscient God, we thank you for reminding us that you know all outcomes before we do. You are the creator, and we are the created. As we study the Scriptural principles in your Word, let us hear comfort and guidance as we process. Let us trust your plan for our world’s leadership; let our spiritual obedience

outweigh our intellectual or emotional pride. Help us to stay committed to you so that we can share the gospel with others compassionately. Let us be responsible citizens to do our part in the peaceful presidential transition; we pray for peace and in gratitude for the men and women who fought to uphold our nation's freedoms. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, it's been a week! Many people are happy with the election results and many others are disappointed, but it is safe to say that we are all ecstatic that the campaign ads are over! Perhaps that will unite us. I jest, but our democracy is a serious matter. We have checks and balances in our governmental systems precisely because human beings can be swayed with power and money and it is our duty to hold the new president, any president including those he selects to help him govern, accountable to his or her promises and to the principles upon which our nation was founded: equal rights, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." No matter how you voted or how you felt after the election (for many the emotions of grief and fear prevail), as Christ followers, let me say that grace, mercy, compassion, and courage are what we all need this week. Winners and losers need a sense of long-term vision and perspective with regard to transitioning the presidential leadership. Let me be another to remind us that Jesus Christ represents us and goes before us in all of life's challenges, even governance. God is still on the throne; Jesus is still our Savior; and the Holy Spirit empowers us to serve as Jesus did.

Driving through the countryside of Virginia recently, there were a lot of presidential signs and American flags promising to "fix" our country. We heard the campaign slurs of anger, hate, lies, name calling, and threats. It is not acceptable or appropriate, so let us be a better

example of love, grace, and mercy. Let us lift one another up and be the light in the darkness of criticism and selfishness. "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near (Isaiah 55:6)." This is good news! Good news because God loves us first as his creation in a created world full of beauty. This year we are finding beauty in all kinds of things, places, concepts, and people. We need that more than ever now. God is present with us even in the ugliness of life, illness, and death. The psalmist tells us that not only did he create the beauty in the world, but out of chaos came calm and definition, even in the floodwaters.

On this Veterans Day weekend, we honor our military branches, officers, and enlisted to show how **grateful** we are that: 1. They served well; 2. They served sacrificially; and 3. They served to preserve our nation's freedoms and liberties. God has been and will be with our soldiers forever and especially when in harms way, or in challenging decisions and battle campaigns. "Veterans Day, formerly known as Armistice Day, was originally set as a U.S. legal holiday to honor the end of World War I, which officially took place on November 11, 1918. In 1938, through an act of Congress, November 11th was made a legal holiday. In 1954, at the urging of the veterans' service organizations, the 83rd U.S. Congress amended the Act of 1938 by striking out the word 'Armistice' and inserting the word 'Veterans.' On June 1, 1954, November 11th became a day to honor American veterans of all wars." [online: <https://www.govinfo.gov/features/veterans-day>]. In 1968, another Bill ensured three-day weekends for federal employees by celebrating certain national holidays on Monday, but state confusion ensued, so in 1975, Veterans Day became its original date of November 11th. We honor

our congregants who served on the Sunday closest to November 11th. Thank you again for your service and your patriotism.

In recent weeks, I have preached about religious freedom, soul competency, priesthood of all believers, and other Baptist distinctives. The Mark passage was scheduled on purpose to be following the election, because it is a familiar illustration of competitive leadership! James and John, Jesus' disciples and first cousins, each wanted the top place of authority and honor. It is human nature to desire recognition, but as we have seen in recent weeks, the cost is great and most people, including John and James, have no idea what that means. The cost to all three was crucifixion or a painful isolating death. Jesus denied their requests but used it as a Messianic prophecy helping them reflect on their baptism and relationship, dining with Jesus at all!

To put this into context, Jesus had just told the disciples he would be betrayed, condemned to death, and would rise again to be among them. He would go willingly because the purpose of his life on earth (his incarnation) was to save others. He used the cup symbolically to help them imagine drinking a figurative cup of poison or sacrifice. The ten other disciples got jealous too! Even after all his teachings and warnings, his small group focused on ambition. What is our motivation when called upon to do hard things? I think of all you veterans, who signed up or were drafted to serve in the military, and who took an oath to defend our country in peace and in war. What courage and motivation to agree to protect our democracy and way of life! Becoming an obedient soldier takes humility and surrender to commanding officers; becoming a deeply committed Christ follower takes humility and surrender to the Lord Jesus

Christ even when one has no idea of the outcome or the future. In verses 41-44, Jesus explained the difference between God's rule and the Gentile rulers: service versus domination.

Those words of sacrifice, "voluntary service," keep coming up to me this week; I choose to serve a loving and forgiving God, so that I can serve others less fortunate or temporarily challenged. I get that because others helped me survive in my past. My calling into ministry demands that voluntary surrender, even though I too get caught up in worldly issues. The Son of Man came as God's servant son to teach, serve, and save, not to rule. He came willingly as a ransom for many, and even knew the outcome!

The word "ransom (Greek: *lytron*)" occurs only here and in Matthew 20:28 and means the "price of release" in reference to slaves or captives being "purchased" or set free. Jesus is speaking of those captured or held in bondage by sin. He was their price for release. **Redemption** of those same people, as defined here, means that Jesus paid with his life to release many from sin, not just the disciples and Jews of his day, but that his crucifixion and resurrection would redeem many, including Gentiles, who would come to Jesus later through the apostles like Paul and Peter after his death. You veterans paid with injuries and some lost lives for the good of the whole country yes, but you also paved the way for future military personnel. Technology and procedures have changed because of your voluntary sacrifice and efforts. Well done!

How are we doing then as Christ followers? Where are our apprentices, disciples? It's not just the pastor's job to find and disciple the next generation. This day of recognition, as we see the flags and poppies

honoring veterans, let us share Jesus with someone. His life was given freely for our faith freedom. It can be fragile, but the rewards are durable and eternal. Amen. ||

Let us pray. Warrior God, we thank you today for these reminders that we serve only through your freedom and strength. Please help us to be committed to the Gospel of Jesus. Encourage us to be faithful even in joy or disappointment, and to trust you in all things. Help us to find beauty and peace together so we may serve your kingdom well. Let us take your yoke of peace upon us this day and in the months to come. It is in Jesus' name, we unite and pray, **Amen.**