



WEEKLY STUDY November 26-December 2, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

JoyFull: A Generous and Abundant Life

Our sermon series for November is: JoyFull: A Generous and Abundant Life. How would you describe yourself? Your family? Your community. Would you use words like joyful? Generous? Grateful? Full of life? These are attributes we aspire to and want others to see in us. So how do we live in these ways? This November as we enter into another beautiful season of intentional gratitude we will be talking about how to live filled with joy in a hard world; how to live out of abundance rather than scarcity mindset; how to hold fast to hope believe that he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion.

Our scripture this week is: Ephesians 1:15-23

"I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which Christ has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us who believe, according to the working of God's great power. God put this power to work in Christ when God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet, and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

- 1)** This is our final week with the theme JoyFull: A Generous and Abundant Life. It's also the final Sunday in the Christian Year: Christ the King Sunday. In her sermon, Rachael Pastoral, our pastoral intern, helped us look more deeply at why we observe "Christ the King Sunday" in the church. She told us that this Sunday was first observed in the Roman Catholic Church through an edict issued by Pope Pius XI in 1925. The observance was then adopted by several Protestant denominations (including Methodists). As Rachael noted, this observance was established as a response to the violence and devastation of World War 1. It was also in reaction to the growing fascism in Europe. Earthly leaders had and were continuing messages of war, of division, of abusive power that was in

opposition to the message of Jesus. Rachael reminded us that Jesus was advocate for the nonviolent way, the way of justice and mercy, the way of peace. And Christ the King Sunday helps us end the year with a reminder of the one to whom we owe our allegiance while leaning toward the hope of the new Christian year with the beginning of Advent next Sunday. (I was fascinated to learn that in the Church of England this is also referred to as 'stir-up' Sunday. There are 2 reasons for this. 1) In their collect used on Christ the King Sunday, it includes these words, "Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people...." 2) And it's also the traditional week that the British "stir up" the Christmas pudding (similar – not the same as fruitcake) that then is aged until served at Christmas.)

Question: What messages of nonviolence, justice, mercy, and peace do we need to be proclaiming to the world as we end this Christian year? In what forms do those messages need to take place so that our methods, words, and actions are in harmony with nonviolence, justice, mercy, and peace?

- 2) Our scripture this Sunday is from the book of Ephesians and is a letter written by Paul (or a follower of Paul) to the church in Ephesus. Rachael explained that the letter – while addressed to the followers in Ephesus was one widely circulated throughout the early church. Unlike other letters, it does not lift up problems of one Christian community but is more about God's plan to unite the world under Christ. I found it helpful when Rachael explained that this letter is to communities – not to an individual. We tend to read scripture as if it is our personal advice alone instead of consider the communal nature of Christianity. This, she said, is about group identity. Reread verses 18 and 19 with this in mind.

Question: In what ways do you see our faith community (Belle Meade UMC) proclaiming through our words and our action the 'hope that we are called to.....the immeasurable greatness of God's power for all who believe.'?

- 3) Rachael talked about a podcast hosted by Kelly Corrigan where she interviewed Matthew Desmond, author of the book *Poverty By America*. In that book he asked, "Why does the US, the richest country on earth, have more poverty than any other advanced democracy?" Rachael said the strategy put forth for eliminating poverty that was most striking to her was this: to make a difference, to eliminate poverty the one thing you have to do is love people. She went on to say that the systems and the policies that promote and keep people in poverty will not change unless we love people.

Question: What do you think about this premise – that our policies and systems need to change in such a way that they reflect a LOVE for all people?

- 4) Rachael reminded us on Sunday what True Power is in reminding us what God has done. She said God's power starts with love. God used God's power to generate new life. And she reminded us that this ability to love and to generate new life dwells in each of us.

Question: How can we be the kind of church that puts our power toward acts of new life? How can we share power with those who are powerless in our world right now?

Prayer:

“Gracious God, we have feasted for Thanksgiving. We have worn shirts stating, “Thankful; Grateful; Blessed.” We have celebrated family and recalled those who we remembered but are no longer with us. It would be so simple to turn quickly from gratitude to greed as we begin to prepare for Christmas. Everywhere we turn, we see the message to buy more. We are spurred by messages of “only one more day to save” and “just one left.” Help us stop. Help us breathe. Help us carry forward our gratitude. But at the same time, we rely on you, God, to stir us up and approach this Advent with resolute will to mirror the true power we see through you. Arm us with grateful hearts and with the assurance of your love. Remind us that your love is not just for us, but for all the world. Stir us up to share love, mercy, justice, peace. Stir us up to examine the leaders we follow, using the teachings of Jesus. Stir us up to harness words of hate and exclusion. Stir us up to act in partnership with the powerless. Stir us up to trust in your power to create new life. Amen

Weekly Challenges:

This week, continue with thanks by choosing organizations to support through “Giving Tuesday” that work for the betterment of our world. Prepare for Sunday, December 3 with our congregations hold the “Christmas Merry Missions” event. Gather items needed by our various mission partnerships and bring them on Sunday. If you are able, sign up to stay after church for lunch and then work with others to put together the H.G. Hill Gift bags or assemble diaper bundles.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)