

First Mennonite Church Edmonton
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On this, Thanksgiving Sunday, we usually draw our attention to giving thanks and praise for all that we have. In years past this may have included a time of sharing where we can each name things that we're thankful for. In any other context it could either sound like a humblebrag, or at the worst arrogance. However, on Thanksgiving Sunday it seems we're given permission to name, and draw attention to the things we're thankful for. But this year feels different. This year we likely find ourselves in different places, some ready to name things we can be thankful for, while others might struggle. And so I don't want to focus so much on the things we can see and name that we're thankful for. Instead, I want us to imagine a little differently.

Over the course of the pandemic, I've read the occasional article that asks the question, "faith, does it make a difference?" Some are written from the perspective of believers and others have been written by outsiders looking in. The general conclusion, surprise, surprise, is that yes, it does. It's been noticed that people who have a faith then to be weathering the pandemic better than those without. The reasons vary, I suspect, purely anecdotally, one of the significant reasons is because we have a larger view of things.

As people of faith, we see things differently, we see both the present struggles, as the apostle Paul might name it, of this world and we see a future. We also see that what we're experiencing is temporary, and we know that these struggles cannot be forever, and that at some point this will come to an end. Our faith tells us this. Our scriptures illustrate this. And I look forward to that day. When we look at the course of history from the perspective of God's people, there have been no shortage of struggles that they have faced. And though it all, a common message is clear from God's people, God's love is steadfast, God's help is sure, God's faithfulness lasts forever.

And it's God's faithfulness which is the focus of our 'fruit harvest' this week.

In our Psalm this morning it's God, God's faithfulness, and God's all embracing concern for all of God's creation which is the core of this Psalm. Throughout the Psalm the Psalmist moves their attention from describing God's goodness, faithfulness, and abundance, to directly addressing God, making claims for faith, claims that continue to hold true today and claims that we can hold to, even in the midst of our struggles. This Psalm is a testimony and witness to God's goodness. It is as much a confession of faith as it is a reminder of God's goodness and faithfulness.

And truth be told, we need both today don't we. I think it's good for us to be reminded, whether we can recognize it or not of God's goodness and faithfulness. We need a witness and a testimony to perhaps remind us of what we might have forgotten ourselves. In some respects this is the perfect Psalm for us to sit with and ponder on

this Thanksgiving Sunday. If we were still in our small group this would be the perfect Psalm to read over and over and over, and to listen the words of assurance, the testimony of God's faithfulness and steadfastness, and be reminded of things that we may have forgotten because of life being what it is; and to just dwell in this reminder of God's goodness and faithfulness.

And perhaps, on a Sunday when maybe not everyone is feeling thankful, this IS the thing to do, this IS the thing that's needed; to be reminded of God's continued faithfulness. That even when we may not be feeling thankful, to remember, with gratitude, that God's faithfulness endures, that God is near and close to all who call on God. That God is steadfast in keeping the promises made, for all generations.

And, in addition to God's faithfulness, it's also right for us to remember the generosity of God's abundance. The theme verse for this series has come from the Gospel of John, in which Jesus says, "I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly." And while it might have felt like a struggle or we might have had to wrestle with a bit of cognitive dissonance, because our experiences haven't exactly felt abundant lately. I think each week we've been able to find, in one way or another, some abundant representation of one of the Fruits of the Spirit. And it's only right, then, that we remember where this all comes from. That it's God who has been abundantly gifting us with these fruits. Our response to God's generosity is both thankfulness and generosity on our part.

At the beginning of this series I mentioned that in pondering the fruits of the spirit that we would be inwardly reflecting on them and imagining how we might outwardly share them. This week has been more inward and outward, and I think without the inward recognition of the source of these fruits for the spirit, an ever faithful God, we can outwardly express our gratitude for God's generosity. And so our thanksgiving must also be extended, and be one where out of our gratitude we give generously, of our time, of our resources, of our gifts and of our abundance. Our thanksgiving must also remember our neighbours, both near and far. Our thanksgiving, must be one where we remember God and God's Kingdom.

Amen.