

All in One Gratitude Sunday

WORSHIP HELPS, SERMON, AND CHILDREN'S TIME

ALL IN ONE PLACE

OPENING OF WORSHIP SERVICE

Prelude

(You may opt to play the video from Christian Care's Gratitude Sunday program by downloading it from our website. The video might be played as a highlight feature during the worship hour prior to the offering, or perhaps in a loop as people gather for worship.)

Welcome

Over 137 years ago, the Christian Church pastors in Kentucky saw a great need for a home for the elderly who had no one to care for them. These amazing spiritual leaders came together and founded a mission to provide the needy with a safe, loving and spiritual family. That same giving spirit continues today throughout our churches as we support the now ten ministry locations we call Christian Care Communities. Thousands of beautiful souls have received the spiritual care, housing and nursing support they needed in their later years through this inspiring mission dedicated to Faith – Care – Family. Today, as we remember what it means to live thankfully, let us give thanks for this important outreach ministry and mission partner. Let us remember that we worship God as Christ's people, as people of Love, of Truth, and of gratefulness for our older church members who have gone before us as a light in our faith journey.

Call to Worship (Option 1)

Leader: We gather today, proclaiming God's love and seeking God's blessing.

People: God loves us with an immeasurable love. God is with us always, even when we are unaware, even when we feel lost or alone.

Leader: In gratitude we come, proclaiming our thanksgiving and seeking to live out our love.

People: In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Leader: Thanks be to God. Let us worship God.

Call to Worship (Option 2)

(based on John 21: 15–19)

Leader: Children of God, do you love the God who hovered over the face of the deep and called the worlds into being?

People: Yes, you know that we do.

Leader: Then feed God's children. Children of God, do you love the God who was revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ?

People: Yes, you know that we do.

Leader: Then take care of God's children. Children of God, do you love the God who breathes new life into us even as we gather this day?

People: Yes, you know that we do.

Leader: Then feed God's children.

Call to Worship (Option 3)

Leader: Christ asked Peter if he loved him.

People: Peter affirmed three times his love of the Lord.

Leader: Christ asks us if we love him.

People: We affirm our love of the Lord in our worship

Leader: Christ calls us to demonstrate our love in service.

People: Lord, help us to witness to your love in the ways in which we care for others. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Opening Prayer (Option 1)

Generous God, giver of every good and perfect gift, we lift our voices today to express our thanks and praise. For health and strength, for family and friends, for our homes and this church community, and for your abiding and life-giving presence, we say thank you. For your love, which knows no bounds, and for empowering us to share your love with others, we sing your praise. Make us deeply aware of your presence today as we gather together to worship, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Opening Prayer (Option 2)

Loving and generous God, you are the font of every blessing, the source of all we have. Your breath gives us life, your love gives us courage and strength, healing and compassion. You care for us like a loving parent and feed our spirits, our minds, and our bodies. We thank you for your abundance given freely to all. But God, forgive us for wanting more, even when we have more than we need. Create in us new hearts to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. Help us to know that our abundance is for others' needs. Great Teacher, write your law on our hearts. God's abundance is enough for all if we share. Amen

RESPONSIVE PRAYERS

Prayers of the People

Leader: Creating God, we thank you for the gift that is life: for the changing seasons, for the tiny seeds that in your Holy Mystery become life-sustaining food, cleansed air, beauty to behold, and life itself.

People: We thank you for the gift of life.

Leader: Loving God, we thank you for the gift of family, friends, and community—those who know us so well that they know when to hold our hand and when to let go. We thank you for those people who journey with us in our times of joy and especially in our times of sorrow.

People: We thank you for the gift of love.

Leader: Compassionate God, we thank you for holding us in troubling times. We pray for those who are journeying through illness, awaiting medical diagnosis, those with life-threatening and degenerative diseases. We know that we do not journey alone but that you are always with us.

People: We thank you for the gift of compassion.

Leader: Challenging God, we thank you for writing your law upon our hearts so that we are called to seek justice and to love kindness. Thank you for moving us to action and challenging us to be your hands and feet in a world so desperately in need of healing.

People: We thank you for the gift of challenge.

Leader: God of all time and place, we thank you for the gifts of life, love, compassion, and challenge. Help us to know that each small individual action together with another's can make a difference to the world and make a world of difference. May your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

People: We thank you for the gift of our call to discipleship.

Let us join our hearts, minds, and voices together as we pray the prayer our Savior taught... (The Lord's Prayer)

OFFERTORY INVITATION AND PRAYER

God's blessings are all around us. For all that we have and for all that we are, we give God thanks and praise. We are now given an opportunity to be a blessing to others at Christian Care Communities through our money, and through our time and talents. We now return to God, so that we might be a part of God's love and God's mission. Our offering will now be received.

Offertory Prayer (Option 1)

Gracious God, you call us to respond to your love by showing love. Accept these gifts we bring, and accept us so together we might be able to show your love and transform the lives of your people who are in the loving arms of Christian Care Communities, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Offertory Prayer (Option 2)

Leader: God hear our prayers and receive this offering.

People: Gracious God accept our offering today for Christian Care Communities as a reflection of our "grateful and generous hearts." By your blessing and our labor may this offering be transformed into food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, community for the lonely, and spiritual care for the elderly. And through the ministry of this congregation may your good news be heard, your peace be felt, and your love be known. Amen.

COMMISSION AND BENEDICTION

Leader: Our worship is over, but now our service begins. We are called to go and live God's love in the world.

People: We go in faith and in hope to feed Christ's sheep and care for Christ's lambs.

Leader: Go in peace, and may the love of God embrace us, the compassion of Christ challenge us, and the Holy Spirit guide us.

People: Amen.

SERMON

Title – “Share with Gratitude” from text of Matthew 14:13-21

Love and gratitude are wonderful emotions, but particularly so when they are spoken—when we express them aloud. The phrases, “Thank you,” “I really appreciate it,” “I really appreciate you,” and “I love you,” are very powerful! These words have the potential to grow our love and strengthen our relationships. To not express those feelings aloud is, therefore, an opportunity lost.

And yet, the truth is many of us do not express our love and gratitude very much at all. Even as a church community we don’t always say it enough. It is not that we don’t love one another, it is not that we don’t appreciate each other and what we do for God’s mission here at (name of your church), it is just that we don’t say it enough.

Note: Here, pastor might take the opportunity to both offer specific thanks to the members of the congregation and/or have members thank one another. For example: “So today, in this spirit, I thought that we might begin our time of reflection with a little thanksgiving. I would ask you right now, if you are comfortable, to turn to your neighbors and say ‘Thank you for being here, and thank you for all the ways you live out your faith here in this church.’ (Give time for people to respond.) Let me now say to each one of you, thank you so much for your presence, and for the many ways you contribute to the life and mission of this church. Your time, your sharing of talents and leadership, and your contributions to both our local ministry and missions change lives every day and are very much appreciated. We are less without you. I am so grateful to be here, in ministry, with all of you. Thank you!”

Expressing our love and gratitude in words is important and often powerful. You want to know something else? It also helps us, we who do the thanking! Indeed, there are many recent studies that show that focusing on our abundance and expressing our gratitude regularly make us happier and healthier as individuals and stronger as a church community. Researchers found that thankful people live happier lives as well and grateful people live longer. So bottom line—don’t be shy! Say thank you! Say it often!

While focusing on our gratitude and expressing it aloud is necessary, we all know, however, that it doesn’t end there. Love and gratitude must also be lived out—expressed in our actions. We all know of cases where someone says “I love you so much,” but their actions are not consistent with their words. They give a mixed message. And we also know that when messages are mixed, people believe our actions over our words. So it is key to both say it and live it.

So, how do we express our love and gratitude to God?

We can say it aloud and we do, regularly through prayers, storytelling, and singing. Indeed, when you think of it, our worship services are often full of words of thanksgiving. But what about our actions? How do we show God thanks and love? For instance, when we have those incredible moments of thankfulness, when our hearts are overflowing with gratefulness and praise, what can we do to express our love and gratitude to God?

Actually, Jesus had something to say about that. When asked once what God expected of a believer, he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.... And...” [here it comes] ... “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22: 37, 39)

Neither of those two commands were new to Jesus' listeners. What was new was the way Jesus linked the two, in essence, saying to people, "You want to express your love to God? Then love one another, love your neighbor. Want to express sincere gratitude for all that God has done for you? Then reach out and care for all those God loves."

Today's passage is the well-known miracle of the five loaves and the two fish and how they were multiplied to feed over five thousand people. Here is where it really starts to become clear that you are to love your neighbor when you start giving of your own food out of trust and love for God.

There were two key ingredients needed in order for this miracle to take place. The first was the generosity of the boy who offered the five loaves and the two fish. There were over five thousand people sitting on a hillside and no one had really prepared for meals to feed the crowd. Ordinarily, if one thousand people shared a loaf of bread, that would be a mere crumb for each of them. If 2,500 people shared one fish, the amount of food would be miniscule.

Imagine now if you were sitting in the midst of the multitude of people who had no food. Would you have offered your only food, realizing that dividing up what you had would result in hardly anything coming back to you? What motivates people to share? I would say the answer is gratitude. You might argue that abundance might be a motivating factor. However, many people have no concept of abundance. They have plenty and do not share. The motivating factor, I believe, for why people take what they have and share it with someone else is gratitude for what they have and a desire to offer it to someone else so that others may enjoy the same. The boy who offered the loaves and fish looked at the hungry crowd and desired to share what little he had so that others could have food and stay and listen to Jesus' teachings.

I'm sure this boy wondered if his contribution would make any difference for so many people. And perhaps he wondered how much bread and fish he would get back. But he offered anyway. And this was the key to the whole miracle.

Which brings us to the second necessary part of this miracle, which is the Lord blessed what was offered and multiplied it to a degree that not only was everyone satisfied, but there were abundant leftovers. When we offer to God, with gratitude and trust, He takes what we offer and He multiplies it. Perhaps He multiplies it back with blessings to us. More often, He multiplies it with blessings on others. And most often, He multiplies it with blessings on both us and others.

As our congregation shares our gratitude on this Gratitude Sunday with Christian Care Communities, we are trusting God to bless the elderly in their care with an abundance. An abundance of spiritual nurturance, good food, warm clothes, nursing supplies and a safe place to call home.

Today, God's love still works through flesh and bone. Today, God still uses people to show others God's love and care. God still works through His Church to bless the elderly at Christian Care. Indeed, as Christ's followers in our time and place, we are called, in grateful response to God's love and abundance, to be nothing less than the hands and feet of God—making a difference in the lives of others, particularly those in need, for Jesus' sake. God promises to be with us in this endeavor. Through the Holy Spirit, God promises to help us show this love, God's love.

Today, on this Gratitude Sunday we take time to reflect on God's words and actions toward us. We experience God's love, God's grace, and God's abundant blessings in our individual lives, and in the

life of this faith community. Today, in a spirit of gratitude, we will pause to give God thanks for all that we have, and all that we are. But let us also take this day and the days ahead to show God our gratitude by letting God's love shine through us to bless others.

Friends, may God's Spirit be with each of us and with our congregation as we seek to grow our faith, our love, and our impact in this coming year. The world is waiting. God's people need us—and what we can give. May God bless us through our words and may God's people be blessed through our actions. Amen.

CHILDREN'S TIME

Preparation

- One large package of Starburst or other individually wrapped snack that is easily shared, keeping in mind any food allergens when necessary

Welcome everyone and tell them that today you have a special treat to share with them. Take out a large bag of candy. Show everyone the bag and ask if they think this bag has enough candy for everyone. Then ask questions on how the candy should be distributed. Some examples: Should the smaller children get less because they are small and the big kids get more because they are big? Should everyone get one piece and I keep the rest because they're mine? Maybe I should let everyone take a handful until it's gone, but what happens if the candy is gone before everyone has their turn? Should I share it with you or keep it for myself? Wait for responses. If there is no response, ask specific individuals their opinion on how to distribute the candy. Make a group decision on how the candy will be distributed.

Tell the group that this is very similar to what happens in the world every day. Some of God's people get plenty of food and plenty of things. In fact they get more than enough. Others get less, but still plenty. And still others get very little of what they need.

Explain that some elderly "grandmas and grandpas" need a little help in finding a nice home to live in, healthy food to eat, and someone to take care of them. These are things you, and our church family, are already blessed with having. As Christians, God tells us to share with each other. The Bible tells us, "*And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices **God** is pleased.*" *Hebrews 13:16*

Discuss how today, we are celebrating Gratitude Sunday by sharing what we have with others.

Distribute candy to everyone based on the agreed upon decision.

Ask the children how they felt when they received their candy. Were they grateful?

Share: "Just like me sharing my extra candy with you made me happy it also made you feel happy and grateful too."

Wonder with the children as to how we might be able to share things they have to help elderly grandmas and grandpas. Wait for responses.

Share: “I am happy to tell you that our church family is big on sharing and helping others. We share our blessings so all the grandmas and grandpas don’t go without. They know the love of God by our sharing with them. Did you notice that every week people bring their offering? Well, some of that money is shared with grandmas and grandpas at Christian Care Communities—so that they might have better lives and learn about Jesus too. As the Church, we support them and make a difference in their lives. Isn’t that cool?”

Children’s Prayer

Dear God, you are kind and generous. You give us so much. We pray today for those who have so little. Help us to share. Help us to be grateful for what we have. Help us to help others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.