

Calvary United Methodist Church  
October 20, 2019

**HOMETOWN PROUD**  
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

**Children's Message:**

Psalm 66:8-9 (ICB)

I invite our children forward for the children's message. Children want to come forward this morning? Whew! I thought it was just going to be me again. Good morning. Thank you for coming up this morning. It is so nice to have you here. Come on up. You are all welcome here this morning.

I want to talk about praising and praising is a great thing for us to do. Do you praise God when you get up in the morning? Yes! It's another day! Do you do that? Well, it might be a little slower...Oh, ouch! I feel like cereal: snap, crackle and pop when my old bones get going. You don't do that yet.

The message today, it says from Psalm 66: You people praise our God. Loudly sing his praise. His protects our lives and does not let us be defeated.

Prayer is powerful because it changes our attitudes. For instance, words are so powerful. If someone says to someone, "You're ugly," how does that make you feel? Not very nice, right? Or "You're fat." Or "You can't play sports." Or "You are no good at..." Words are powerful, aren't they? But if someone says, "You look beautiful today," or "I like your outfit," "You run faster than anyone else," it just feels good when we use words of praise, doesn't it?

So, God tells us we should always praise others when we can and mostly we praise God. Some of you went to school this year. Did all of you go to classes of some kind this year? And a lot of schools have a back to school time when you get there and it's exciting and teachers and cheerleaders in some places and sports, they get everyone excited, don't they? Right?

Some of you watch sporting events. Is there ever a sporting event that someone doesn't get excited? Do you think that's possible? One team or the other gets pretty excited. We call it school spirit or team spirit, when you go to schools all around the place they have men and women who are cheering and trying to get everybody all worked up. And before they had loud speakers they had these megaphones and you say, "Everybody praise God," or excited about your team. Why? Because we like to be excited and God said you should be excited because life is an exciting journey.

And every morning when we get up and we start we should begin with praise because today is a gift. Today is a gift from God.

So, here we are at Calvary and we come here because God says we should praise God when we meet in this place called Calvary, we have the praise power option.

So, when you get up in the morning and stretch, I usually say, "Thank you God for today. Let me be happy when I meet people today. Let me talk to You about others today." And all day long when you expect to meet others, at school, at work, in play, with your parents and grandparents, if you say, "I hope I can see good things today." Can you work on that? Can we all work on that?

We choose an attitude of praise, not "Oh, Lord, I've got to get going," but "Oh, Lord! I'm so happy. Today's a gift that I get to live for you." And so we go out whether it is raining or whether it is shining and whether we're getting good grades or whether we are getting celebration marks, we are just grateful because we have friends and we are thankful because we get to do things together and we get to learn together and we get to visit grandparents together and sometimes we are excited because we get rewarded.

Do you get rewards? Like going to bed on time, being nice to others, doing your homework, clearing away your toys, getting dressed, brushing your teeth. I don't know that most of us have these award papers at home. I just am thankful to get through a day and say, "Thank You, God, I got through a day." Right?

And sometimes we high-five people around us and our families because it is just a good day to celebrate. We look to the stars, and you know what? God looks to you and says, "You are a gift. Remember that. You are a star." We are sheep in the pasture of God. He cuddles us. Do you like to hug? Please say yes. Healthy hugs are a good thing. They are healing for us when we get hugged by people who we know love and care about us, if it's the people we trust. And God says, "I want to hold you close. I want to love you. I want to care for you. I want to be there for you when you are frightened." And so we praise because we are like giving a hand to God.

We thank God because it is a privilege. And some of the privileges are coming here to serve. Some of you have already been baptized and you are going to see children today being baptized and some other members of the church and as a part of our praise to God, we offer ourselves to do things like being an acolyte or perhaps singing and dancing and doing things in the church. We offer ourselves to God as we pray as a family and we try to choose to pray and praise God. We choose, it's a decision you make every day to choose praise.

And so my prayer today is that you will always always always choose to praise Almighty God.

Thank you for coming up and you may have a fruit snack on your way down this morning.

## Message:

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

The Prophet Jeremiah had been speaking to the people of God for a long time. If you will remember during the last couple weeks, the Prophet was talking to people who were picked up. It would be like someone came into America, drove us all into slavery, hauled us off into Mexico. You don't like the thought of it, I know. That's what war was like, they take you from your nation to another nation. You become a refugee. And they are crying by the waters of Babylon we set because we couldn't make music, we couldn't do anything and God said, "You can't put your life on hold. You need to bloom where you are planted. You need to marry and settle down and plant gardens and get a life." And that's His Word to us today. His Word to us is in some ways have a hometown pride. And some people say hometown? Do you know where I came from? You remember Jesus? He started preaching and he was walking with friends and he would talk in the tabernacles and speak in the synagogues and people said, "Isn't this Joseph and Mary's son? His dad was a carpenter. He came from a little place called Nazareth. What in the world could he have to say for us?" In other words, he was a nobody from a no place. You gotta be probably from where? LA? New York City? Chicago? Someplace of real value? And God says, "That's not correct at all."

I know in all of my life there's a lot of desert places. A lot of people looked a Jesus and thought of evidently that Nazareth was a desert place. I grew up in a little village called McVeytown. A lot of people think it's a desert place. Some of you grew up in coal mining areas and wood areas and places where there were little factories in the middle of nowhere. And other people looked and say, "Aren't you glad to be out of there." And I say, "No, I thank God for my heritage."

You see, learning to bloom where we are planted is a part of where God is. We move around in life and it is a good thing because we mix it up a bit. When I look at McVeytown and people used to make fun, "Oh, my gosh, that's a little Podunk." I didn't even live in McVeytown, just 350 to 400 people that was a town. I lived in the rural more plush areas. Any everybody said, "You had nothing to do." Well, we had a funeral parlor, see who was showing. We could go to a grocery store, post office. That's about it, but you know what? What's that old phrase? We didn't know any different.

I do know this: I couldn't have picked a better life if I had to design it myself because of parents and family and the churches that work together, that showed me what it is like. Little towns have something that they have to survive, they have to cling and help each other. Oh, there is gossip and problems, but you know what? When there are problems they usually are there for each other.

You see, God understands. It's not about little towns or big towns, it's about belonging. It's about wherever you are, make the best of it. And Jeremiah was trying to give hope to people who were without hope. They were the people of Israel who had lost their hope. They had lost hope that God was even with them. They couldn't play, remember their lyres that hung

in the tree? How can we make a good sound in this foreign land? And God says, “No matter where you are, I am with you. I am with you.” Even when we cry out in a refugee camp, even when in a desert, even when we are in trouble, even when we are in prison, even when we think there is no way out of our situation, God said, “Did you ever see this? Did you ever see a tree blooming and growing out of a middle of a rock pile? I am the God who will let you bloom in the darkest and the dreariest and the most difficult situation. I am your God and I will make it happen if you cling to me. Because I am hope in a hopeless world. I am here for you right now. I am here for you tomorrow. I am here for you every single day.”

And there is nobody who needs to know that more than these little children we have just baptized. One of the greatest responsibilities parents and grandparents and we as the body of Christ who just said we will help is to remind them that you are never alone. You are a gift from God and God will be there for you every day. And the Prophets spoke out to the people time and time again through the Word to remind them that God is with them. What was this word?

Build houses, Settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons and give you daughters in marriage so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number. Why is this so powerful? Because you will have peace. You will have prosperity in the city that they have carried to you. Pray to the Lord for it because it will prosper you too.

If we don't, what would life be like? If we just did wait to go back to the old days...A lot of us here from time to time will say things like, “Oh, the good old days.” Well, they weren't all good. We aren't living in the good old days. We are living today and God said, “I am with you today. I am here to help you today.” And so what we commit to from that scripture is: Lord, I am here to serve you today. I am choosing today, I love this from Joshua: Choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Have you made that decision that you will serve the Lord God with all your heart and with all of your soul. It calls for radical obedience, that God is not just number 1. I love this devotion I read this week: God doesn't want to be just number 1, God wants to be our very life. Everything we do, everything we think about is in framing of God. How about that? I am first a godly person. I belong to Almighty God. And it's finding our place to serve God, even as these children grow and even as new members come I reminded them in our class this week: no one joins a church, no one joins Lions, fire company or sport to become inactive. We are to find our place in the Kingdom of God and it changes throughout life. And I'm saying: Are you ready for that challenge? Are you ready not only to trust God but are you ready to step out in faith?

I love this idea that we are all missionaries, that everyone can hear that call of Jesus to go forth and proclaim. I don't know what your call is. We are not all called to be up here. We are not all called to go specific other places in the world, but we are all called.

Sometimes we get the idea that missionaries are only out there to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and do those kind of things. We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus. And do you realize most of us are not called to go over to anyplace overseas. Most of us aren't even called to go around in our nation. Most of us are called of God to serve right where we are planted, right here, right now, you happen to be in the Harrisburg area and God is saying this is where you are. What is it that you are called to in your family and your friends and your co-workers and the church and the community? We are missionaries. You are the Word of God and the only Word that some people will ever see and they are looking so desperately in the world that is filled with troubles.

God's plan is what? It's to communicate with people through people. You and I are people. That's the only way God has a chance to talk to others. Are you preparing? Reading? Studying? Praying? Are you committed? But the greater question is: are you going? Or are you just waiting for somebody else to do it?

Loving Jesus is a great thing and hopefully they will see it, but they also need to hear the Word. Understand that God's desire for you is life to be abundant and eternal. Do you believe that? Wow! Do you believe that God wants you to have abundant and eternal life? You still don't. How about an Amen? (Amen.) Do you think God wants that for everybody? I do. And how in the world will they know that if we are tight mouthed? How will they know it? You see, we're not only missionaries, we are evangelists for Jesus Christ.

I had a pastor the other year ask some folks: Have you ever led another person into a personal relationship with Jesus? This has nothing to do with inviting someone to Calvary or to church. Have you ever taken anyone in the midst of their trials and said: You know where I go to when I am having problems? Jesus Christ. He is my Savior. And they say: What? I'm not talking Holy Roller here, radical religious fanatic. I'm talking someone who is looking for God who is the Savior. And if we've never done that you have been in the church twenty thirty forty fifty sixty seventy years, I want to say why not? Because we wonder why churches are dwindling? Guess why? We don't talk about Jesus. There is virtually nothing that goes unspoken about around our tables more than God. We talk about a lot of things we shouldn't speak about, but we don't talk much about God.

When I think about what God has given me and done for me and provided for me and the promise of not only where he's taken me so far but what the promise of eternal life is, I think I have the ability one person at a time to talk to people about God. We need to feel comfortable, we need to be able to do that one person at a time, to lead others into a relationship with God.

And a part of that starts by who we are. I've met a lot of people on my walks. There are a lot of people in the church I don't know that I want them representing the God I have. How about that? Mean. Nasty. Unforgiving. Nasty! How's that? Come to follow my God. Did

you ever see that comedian that does the grumpy old man? Not very inviting, right? Not very inviting at all. If they see you ripping into the waitress, store clerk, if they see you ripping into someone in traffic, mean and nasty, no forgiveness, they hear you talking about people who have hurt you in life and instead of being...we all get angry, I get angry, but it is filled with hatred and vengeance and there is no compassion for the poor or the homeless or the immigrant, for the prisoner. There is only nasty in us. How in the world would they see Jesus in you?

I am going to say it many times, mirror, mirror on the wall, can you see Christ in me at all? If others don't see Jesus in you, how will they find Jesus Christ?

There are many doors we walk through every day. I get up, I walk into the door of the church. Some of you walk into your place of employment. You walk into schools. People come into your door at your home. People come in to your places of recreation and sports and Ys and where you work out and all of those doors are open opportunities for you to be a witness for Jesus Christ and you can either say, "I'm open." Or "Sorry, I'm closed." And my prayer is that we become open because I love this photo. Remember Jesus knocking on the door? He's not going to force himself on anybody. He says, "I invite you to welcome me into your life." Welcome me into your life and what will happen? My life has been forever changed because God accepted me who I was.

So, when you think there is nothing to do on your list I think there is lots to do, people to introduce to God. You are today a prophetic voice for the Kingdom of God. You are today for those who are refugees, for those who are in prison, for those who are dying, for those who are in nursing homes, for those who are sick. You and I, for the children and for the young and the old alike we are to bloom where we are planted that you and I can be hope. And we just can't say, "I hope to do that when I retire," or "I hope when I have more time."

I gave these cards out years ago, they actually were little round wooden. How many times have you said when I get a round tuit? You've said that right? I'll do it as soon as I get a round tuit. Now, at last you've got a round tuit. If you don't get around to it, someday we are going to be gone and it is going to be too late.

If you don't like culture today, I'm not a real fan of it. I don't think we've had a week in the last two months that there has not been someone murdered in Harrisburg, York or Lancaster, right? And we complain about it. How many people are you leading to Jesus that they might be loving instead of murderous? I don't believe we can continue to complain about the evil if we are doing nothing about it. We are light. We are hope. We are salvation. We represent eternal life. And we can choose to make a difference.

Remember this man named Joseph, who was thrown into the pit. He choose to bloom where he was planted. His brothers wanted him dead but make a buck off of him. He went into prison. He went into prison, but rather than be mad, he made the best of his prison time and

changed a nation. What are you going to do with the bad that is sent your way? Can you learn to praise God?

We have military people representing our country. We have missionaries representing Jesus Christ. They go around the world and they bloom where they are planted. Do you think people want to be shot at? Do you think even if they are not shot at that you want to be away from your family and your friends and your comfort? They do it because they want change. When I think of the people who go where there aren't showers and it's 100 and some degrees or it's 20 below and I think of people who serve away, they sacrifice. What are you willing to sacrifice right where you are? An hour a week to visit a nursing home? An hour a week to visit a prison? An hour a week to read for children who have no one? Are you willing to give anything?

There are times we have all been annoyed in life by people knocking on our doors, right? As much as we may not like Mormons and others who come, let me tell you, I admire, admire, the faith of people who give up, I'm told, two to three years of their life to go talk to you about God. You know what we are interested in? We gotta get through high school, we gotta get through college. We've got to get the best job so we can make the best money and retire as soon as we can and hurry and die. Boy. Wow, that's something. You see, if we all focus on God, it's not about the money and retirement and comfort and pension. It's what can I do? I wish we were so concerned about the people's relationship with God that all of us would take time, not even two years, how about an hour once in a while.

Jeremiah was speaking to people who were broken. You and I are surrounded by people who are broken at work and at home and in our families even in our own family. And you and I have the answer to the problems. It is in Jesus Christ. It's finding your purpose and it can't be found anywhere else until we get connect to God.

One of the things I've been reminded about in small communities is they have to be connected or they die. You can't survive alone. When we connect to the source of power...have you ever plugged something in and you find out the circuit is dead, you don't go very far, do you? If you and I don't plug into God, we are going nowhere. We are going into nowhere. We need to be connected to the people, we need to be connected to God and we need to do it all the time, every day.

I was reading that most people will move at least six times. When I read this I went over it again this morning, I discovered I've lived in 12 towns more than 2 years since I started for college, seminary and churches, etc. And people simply say, "Well, I'm only going to be here five or six years, no use in getting in touch with a church or the community. I'll wait until I retire and go back home." Imagine with your family, you move into a new house and your friends and family say, "This place is really a dungeon. We need to paint it, we need to...Ah, come on. Let's not do anything. We are only going to be here six years." It wouldn't go far, would it? Bloom where you are planted today.

If you are assigned by a company to work in China for a year, bloom in China for a year. Wherever we are we are called to bloom because we have to get busy living or else we are going to be busy dying. We are on a path, a path to the Kingdom of God and one of my favorite reminders of this path? My clock is running out. And these little ones are just starting the sands of time.

You and I have so much to do with the time allotted to us. We need to become hometown proud. We need to be Calvary proud. We thank God for those of you who want to unite with us today and we thank God for the parents who want to bring their children in the name of Jesus Christ. We need to be Kingdom of God proud. We need to praise God. And we need to understand this isn't a spectator sport. Being a part of the family of God is finding your place to connect. We say it in our vows, all of us renewed it this morning to support Calvary with our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service. This place of Calvary is only a lighthouse in this community. We are the place where we go forth and we need you because there is a place for you.

There is a personal message from God that you have to listen to. I don't have the answer for you for God. To be active and wellbeing in the life of the church we need to be a part of it. And why? I love this continuation:

“I know the plans I have you for,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come to me and pray and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord.

I invite you today to seek the truth, to seek God, to seek the relationship and if we do so through humble prayer and seeking and turning to God, we will bloom and what a great floral display it is be. You are a gift from God and together we make a wonderful bouquet.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you, we praise you that you have selected us as your children. Inspire us, speak to us, move in our hearts that we will be faithful to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.