

Calvary United Methodist Church
April 28, 2019

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS SERVANTS

Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

1 Corinthians 3:6-11,16

I'd like to call all of our children forward for the children's message, if they would like to come up. Good morning! Even on this week after Easter you are all here and I'm so happy to see you! Thank you for coming! It's kind of quiet up here.

Well, today is a very special day. We are talking about celebrations. How many of you like to celebrate? Me, too! Cause there is always cake and pie, right? And ice cream. Do we like to celebrate? It's always good things.

Well, there are wonderful passages of the scripture all through the Bible that tell us that there is plenty to thank God for, right? There is so much: just getting up in the morning and whether it is sunshine or whether it is rain, God knows best what we need. But the scripture I share this morning says:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all! The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your request to God and the peace of God...that's just like this wonderful feeling that everything is okay—that's a good thing to have...transcends all your understanding, will guard your hearts and you minds in Christ Jesus.

You see, when we rejoice, it puts a sense of joy in our heart. It is a great song. I used to sing a song called "Rejoice in the Lord Always and Again I say Rejoice." Have you ever sung that? Because you can just sing...I'm the whistling pastor sometimes because I feel so happy in the morning, I come in and I'm whistling a lot because we rejoice. There is so much for which to give thanks to Almighty God.

And so today, this day here at this family of Calvary, we are celebrating. There are so many things we celebrate in life and I bet you know a few. You've probably had birthday parties? Sometimes we have anniversary parties. Sometimes we celebrate sports things. Sometimes, in a couple of months, we'll celebrate July 4th, right, and we put off fireworks and we have Memorial Day where we honor our veterans and those who have given the ultimate sacrifice for us. We celebrate so many ways. When you get a good report card; when things go well at home and you are doing your jobs; we celebrate the first time we can ride a bike, the first time we can swim. We can just celebrate all the time if we look with a thankful heart at what we have. We celebrate when there is new life. When you came into this world as a little baby, so many people were happy, right? Because every child is a gift from Almighty God.

Just last week we celebrated at church. It was called what? Easter. We celebrated the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. The tomb was empty. He rose from the dead and he saw Mary and some other disciples to tell them everything was going to be okay and he tells all of us today, can you hear that? Everything is going to be okay.

God gives us new life and new opportunities all the time. I want to remind us there are so many things we forget to celebrate like having someone older and wiser that might read with us. People like our grandparents or older friends and neighbors and teachers. That's something to really celebrate because not everybody has it. Sometimes we celebrate times with moms and dads and the people who are close to us because just laughing and having fun, do you do that from time to time? It's a great thing to celebrate family.

Sometimes having someone to hug just when you either want to celebrate or you are having a good or a bad day, we want to be around someone that loves us and cares for us.

I bet sometimes you've gotten trophies or letters or stars of recognition for a subject at school or sports. It's called celebration.

Celebrate when we have victories. We celebrate when people do something like 50 years. How many here have over 50 years of marriage? Wow! These people have been married and loved one another for 50 years. See, that's a pretty significant thing. Every moment of every day is a chance to celebrate.

It's a chance to rejoice. Why? Well, let me tell you who we are doing it today. Because you are surrounded here by all these people, everyone, including you, who are servants of the Most High God. You know you serve, right? You do stuff around home, you do stuff for friends, you do stuff for family. Mostly we do stuff for God. That's called serving other people. And so we give thanks to God that we have something to share because the church, if we don't serve, and the church isn't this building, it's all of us. We are really not the church if we don't serve others. We have to serve others and we do it all the time.

I sometimes hear the word "volunteer" and I've used it, but really in the church that's the wrong word. We shouldn't use the word "volunteer." What we are is servants of the High God. There are several stories in the Bible and the one I'm thinking of is a man Daniel who was going to be thrown into a fiery furnace and another time he was with a den of lions. You've heard those stories? And you know why he wasn't afraid? Because he said, "I'm becoming a servant of the Most High God." See, we need to remember when we do stuff, it is not just for our moms and dads and friends and neighbors and relatives. We serve God and that's why we give thanks today.

When Jesus was here on earth, he showed us how to be not a volunteer, a servant by washing the feet of those he met. That was really a different thing that people weren't accustomed to in that day. He reminded all of us that if he is the leader and serves, then we ought to do it and so we celebrate those opportunities all the time.

How many of you ever saw an old western movie? Anybody out there? Some of you might have been in them, I don't know. They had all these towns and you see how that looks like a town? I want you to look at the back of that. Can you see the back up there? There is no town. It's just a front of a building to make it look like there is a house there. You see, when we serve, there are so many things behind the scenes that we don't see; people that make things happen. For instance how many of you like to have cereal for breakfast? Some of you have milk on the cereal? How did that

milk get there? Did it just show up at the store? Did you parents just go buy it, maybe? How does it get there? It comes from a cow. So someone has to get up early every morning of the year and every evening of the year, you can't take any days off, someone has to cover if you do. The cows need milked. And someone has to feed the cows and you know it's the same way if you like strawberries, someone has to take care of the gardens.

Everything we are a part of has people behind the scenes, including how we serve, that many people around here and in our community do things that you don't see them, but we thank God for them. We celebrate whatever people do. Some things are seen and some things aren't seen. So it's real important that you always give thanks to everybody because everybody is a part of making this world better.

We serve God from the heart and we thank others from our heart, for we give thanks for all the things that take place. Every time we serve it's like this: we are offering God and others, saying: Thank you. Serving is a big way to say thank you to God for giving us the wonderful life we have and it makes such a difference in people's lives because there is always someone who needs a help. It is giving a hand up, it's making other know. Sometimes you say, "Well, why do we do this today?" It's our way of saying thank you. It's very important that we thank one another.

So, today before you leave here, everyone, say thank you to the people around you for serving God in their specific way. I don't know what it is. Many of them are behind the scenes, but everyone in here is serving God.

Thank you for coming up this morning. We have some fruit snacks before you go back. And I pray you have a wonderful week.

Message:

I know a whole lot about feet, but I know this: I've been really glad to see some to my doorsteps. That's what that scripture is about. Imagine our Savior Jesus Christ coming to your house. Imagine, and we will as we go through this this morning what it is like when someone you have longed to see brings you a message of hope, brings you a spark of joy. When you are at your lowest and you just open up and smile.

As I reviewed this lesson last night and this morning I thought if we could treat others when we hear the footsteps...have you ever seen a dog or a cat or some other pet in the house when you open your door? Everything wags. I won't get it going too much, we'll hurt ourselves up here, but everything wags, right? They are so excited. How excited I've been in days in my life when you have just longed, you are alone, you are lonely, you are hurting, you've lost and you see the feet. How beautiful are the feet of those one sees.

You see, Mary Magdalene knew that quite well. The Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came into her life. She was down, she was out, she was feeling outside the crowd. He made her feel loved. He reminded her that she had new life, she had forgiveness of her sins. God does that every day to all of us. He says:

You are mine, there is nothing you could do that could put you away from my love. I am your intercessory between God. God loves you and I love you and therefore you are forgiven and today, no matter what people around you, friends or family or strangers say, you are mine. You are mine and I love you.

I can't imagine the depth of joys there must have been for the disciples and those who had hope for the man who was going to deliver them from the slavery of their lives and yet we have it today. We need deliverance day after day after day and it's the Lord Jesus Christ who does that. And you know what? You are those feet. You are those hands of Jesus Christ into the world. Can we say, "Praise God for all of us?" Praise God for your neighbor, your brother, your sister, your spouse, your partner, your friend, your strangers that you meet. We are the hands and feet. We are the Good News. Imagine being away for a semester of school, imagine being away in Afghanistan and you come back home. Imagine being apart. Most of my adult life, my sister lived out west. She served in the military thirty years in Colorado. Once a year, you know what it's like to see people you love once a year? Times have changed, now we can talk and things. How beautiful! Hear this again:

How beautiful are the feet.

What it is to celebrate? Sometimes in this world we live in, in America in particular, we are scattered. We have family all over, don't we? All over America and some all over the world. And sometimes you are away for ten, twenty, thirty years. I love to hear the stories of those high school classes, graduates, are now getting together once a month with their old friends and you haven't seen them in twenty years and you say, "What's been happening with you lately?" You catch up and the joy of the heart of hearing those things, of celebration that's good.

Do you want to celebrate? Do you know what it's like to celebrate? Be sick all night alone. Be hospitalized away from your family and friends when you are half way across America or you are alone now in your later years, your children are spread out and someone knocks at your door with soup or someone gives you a card, someone calls and says they are praying for you. Do you want to know how beautiful those feet are? You know what it is? It's you. You do this stuff all the time and so I am saying, thank God for you! You make a difference and so many times we think, "Aw, I don't do anything big." It's not the big stuff. It's all these small simple things that connect to people's hearts and lives and you are life changers for Almighty God.

Have you ever been frightened, yes, even as adults? Yes. Did you ever take out a new mortgage? If that's not frightening, nothing is. Right? Have you ever moved to a new home, a new community, a new center, started your life over after some loss? What's it like to hold on to someone, do you remember holding on? You know darn well you do. Having someone that you know is going to be there for you, we celebrate that.

Sometimes we talk about the elderly and I'm very careful now that I'm in that range. Life isn't what it used to be. I've had friends help me with the knee and feet, right? We need help. We can't do it ourselves. Help us in and out of cars. Help us into our rooms. Help us wherever. Did you ever see feet and say: Thank God you are here? That's you! We celebrate you today because everything you do, it's not about the big stuff, everything you do you are the hands, you are the feet of the Savior Jesus Christ.

I am in those privileged positions where I speak to those who have suffered great losses. Imagine being with your spouse or partner, someone, 50 or 60 years and they are gone and you don't have any children and you don't have anyone else, and someone knocks on the door and says, "Good day, I'm Meals on Wheels." You know what you just did? You gave new life. You gave a spark of new hope. You gave someone that was alone feeling: Thank God Almighty. Hear this? I have not been forgotten. We celebrate you.

Thankfully most of us have not been incarcerated. The Lord is pretty clear about those who are, why there might be prices to pay for our culture. We are not to forget them. We are to love, we are to care, we are to work on forgiveness. Can you imagine being away and the thought that no one, people that even Christ said they love us, don't even care? We need to care.

We've had many funerals here this year, if you are not aware. Funerals don't just pick certain people, they pick all people. You know what it was like to be broken, alone, to suffer loss. Have you ever had those phone calls, I've had a few in my life: I got some very bad news, or sad news to tell you this morning. I remember when I got the call about my father. I was in Africa. Do you know how hard it is when you are alone and you want someone to be there for you? Do you know what it is like to be this person who got a phone call from the doctor's office: we have your test results back? There is a lump. And you know what makes the difference? When they see the feet and the feet might come in a phone call, a letter of encouragement. It might come from the very presence at the door saying: I'm here for you.

Hear this clearly: I am here today to celebrate you, to celebrate you, because the world we live in has daily brokenness and you and I are the feet of Jesus Christ to offer new life, to offer new hope, for those who are hungry. Oh my Lord. I have been in refugee camps. Could you imagine once a day you get your scoop and you are met with smiles? I don't know if you can see them very well. Some smiles and some eyes with wonder. Somebody that I don't even know loves me. Someone that I don't know cares about me. Somebody wants to make a difference in my life.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, proclaim salvation, who says to Zion: Your God reigns! Of all things to hear today, small things make a big difference. Don't think that: oh, I'm not as rich as those other people, I can't do so much. I don't have as much time. I don't have as much talent. I'm not as much gifted. All that it takes is a heart, a heart that says: I will do what I can, not what other people do, I will do that I can.

You heard this; I'm going to read it again. It's about Paul telling this: I planted the seed. It's planting time. Do you like those strawberries? You know someone did that last fall or last spring because the ones this year will give the best production. I planted a seed and Paul has watered it, but God has been making it grow, so neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything but only God who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor, for we are co-workers in God's service. You are God's field, God's building. By the Grace that God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder and someone else is building on it, but each one should build it with care, for no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid which is Jesus Christ.

Do you know how many people have been a part of your life to get you this far? I can think of every Sunday School teacher I ever had. Can you do that? I remember Olive. She was the lady that came around with the mission cake. It was a cardboard or plastic cake, something like that, and you always put money in for your birthday that went to missions. I'll never forget Olive.

I have on my dresser a picture of Jesus knocking on the door that was given to me by my 5th grade Sunday School teacher, Mary Miller, who is still living. That's been in every house, that's gone on many missions with me.

Small things. Never forget the impact you have on others. This is why it is so important to be the light of Jesus Christ for other people. God needs that. Do you know today...I got this off the web this week...there are now 7,714,576,923, don't ask me how they come up with a number like that, that's how many people are in the world. And you know how many of them need to know they are loved? 7,714,576,923. And you know how many of them we ought to celebrate? Every one.

God in God's great design did this. All that many people and guess what? Not one is the same. Not one! That's why you are important, because no one else can touch people in the way you do. You are a gift to me, to this church, to this community, to the nation, to the world. You are the hands and the feet and we celebrate you today and thank God for you today.

What I like about this photo of the fingerprint reminds me of this: You are a special recipe of strengths, talents and qualities all from God. How about that? That says: I'm different than everyone. God stirred me up. I love that imagery of I'm a unique recipe of strengths, talents and qualities.

Thank God for you this day. And we ought to always celebrate our neighbor in all the things we do. And you know what, sometimes people come up front and we've purposely, the staff put this together. We don't want to recognize any individual group because it hurts others. You know those of you who do remember the old west, I want to tell you there are some of us who are here and you give thanks to. There are so many people behind the scenes. Just like I mentioned about the farmers behind the scenes, the people who lead the ball teams and clean the fields and mow the grass and if we went through the community and the people who make things happen, there are more people behind the scenes than there are in front. You might thank the surgeon who operates on you, but let me tell you there are a lot of people behind the surgeon.

We thank you, we celebrate you, we praise God for you today for all that you make possible. There are so many places God reminds us to sing praise. I will sing the Lord's praise for he has been good to me. The Lord lives; praise be my rock exalted, be my God and Savior. Praise the Lord, give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His love endures forever.

You see, God is good and you are living for God, making a difference. You're an amazing power of God that works in our lives. So today we give thanks and in giving thanks sometimes we think it is just now. If you remember that video at the beginning, I have one more video as we close here today. The video at the beginning let you know clearly, if you remember it, that what you do touches someone who touches someone, just like my Sunday school teachers and high school teachers and

my parents and grandparents and virtually every person I have ever met in life, a lot of strangers that I don't even know their names have changed my life. They have changed yours. And you have changed lives just by being the light of Christ.

Way back around, I think it was in late 80s or early 90s Ray Boltz wrote a song called "Thank you." It was given to me when I left one of my parishes in York, PA, Red Lion, and it reminds you that what you are doing today isn't just a difference that makes today in my life, it has eternal consequences. I personally cannot watch this video even dozens of times as I have without weeping in thanksgiving for people who have touched my life. You see, someday God will call us home and this video is about what it will be like when you go to heaven and you think: Oh, Lord, I have been so insignificant. And you'll meet all the people whose lives you've touched. That might sound quite imaginary to you, but I believe this. You, every person in the pew this morning, make a godly difference. I thank God personally for you. I thank God for what we do corporately and I invite you to listen to the words of this song now and consider how you will make a difference.

(VIDEO of song)

THANK YOU by Ray Boltz

I dreamed I went to heaven,
You were there with me
We walked along the streets of gold
Beside the crystal sea
We heard the angels singing
Then someone called your name
You turned and saw a young man
He was smiling as he came
He said friend, you may not know me now
But then he said but wait
You used to teach my Sunday school
When I was only eight
Every week you would say a prayer
Before the class would start
One morning when you said that prayer
I asked Jesus in my heart

Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am a life that was changed
Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am so glad you gave

Then another man stood before you
And said remember the time
A missionary came to your church
His pictures made you cry
You didn't have much money, But you gave it anyway

Jesus took the gift you gave
And that's why I'm here today
Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am a life that was changed
Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am so glad you gave

One by one they came,
As far as the eye could see
Each one somehow touched
By your generosity
Little things that you had done, sacrifices made
Unnoticed on the earth, heaven now proclaims
And I know up in heaven
That you're not supposed to cry
But I was almost sure
There were tears in your eyes
As Jesus took your hand
And you stood before the Lord
And He said my child look around you
For great is your reward

Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am a life that was changed
Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am so glad you gave
I am so glad you gave
I am so glad you gave

Songwriters: Raymond H. Boltz
Thank You lyrics © Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Universal Music Publishing Group

I don't know how that touched your heart. It touches mine every time. I give Almighty God thanks for my folks, my family, my friends because you, you, you, you make a difference every day. Most of us could probably honestly say we wouldn't be here today if it weren't for someone that has touched your life in a significant way. Know this: not only does it make a difference today; it makes an eternal difference.

Can we give God a thanks for celebrating us? How about that? (Applause.) God is a great God that trusts us with all good gifts and we just praise God. I invite you to come to prayer with me:

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us a message to share with the world. Thank you for allowing us to be instruments of your peace. Thank you that you have made 8 billion of us different and our gifts, our strengths, our talents and ability are so unique that we can touch someone's life in a very unique way that no one else can. Not only do we celebrate that today, Lord, we give you thanks for trusting us. In Jesus' name, Amen.