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Oct

Chosen

Always Give Thanks

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

But the lectionary invites us to start our thanksgiving early. Before the turkey and pumpkin pie and even before the trick-or-treaters come to our doors, we have the opening salutation of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians: "We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in..."

REFERENCES

Exodus 33:12-23

Psalm 99

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Matthew 22:15-22

COLORS

Green

Planning Worship

Focus text: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

During a time of year when many churches are focused on giving, we turn for the next three weeks toward *thanksgiving*. Too early? Are you wondering if this series is better suited for November instead of October? Maybe so. But the lectionary invites us to start our thanksgiving early. Before the turkey and pumpkin pie and even before the trick-or-treaters come to our doors, we have the opening salutation of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians: "We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly..." (verse 2).

You know that warm feeling you have inside when a friend of a friend meets you, and says, “I have heard so many good things about you!”? I have to imagine that’s how the Thessalonians felt when they received this letter. Before Paul begins discussing their chosen-ness, he claims them. He *remembers* them with thanksgiving. He prays for them and feels connected to them despite their being apart. I wonder, what relationships in your congregation feel like this? What neighborhood partnerships produce this feeling of gratitude? What connections are you giving thanks for right here and now? How can you express this thanksgiving in worship?

To emphasize the theme of thanksgiving, consider whether you want to use a hymn of thanksgiving or gratitude as a thread woven throughout the three weeks of this series. Some traditional options include “Now Thank We All Our God” (*United Methodist Hymnal* 102), “Come, Ye Thankful People, Come” (*United Methodist Hymnal* 694), and “For the Beauty of the Earth” (*United Methodist Hymnal* 92). These well-known hymns offer opportunities to hear the familiar in new ways—whether by changing the tune or using a verse as a prayer response—while also leaning into a heart song in your community. You might also consider a newer song that is less familiar to your congregation, such as “Praise God for This Holy Ground” (*Worship & Song* 3009) or “All My Days” (*Worship & Song* 3011). Vary how you use the hymn from week to week, and by the end of three weeks, it may become a new favorite!

If you do happen to be in a season focused on stewardship, remember: thanksgiving and generosity go hand in hand. In one of his final articles as Director of Stewardship and Generosity, Rev. Ken Sloane notes **the power of saying thank you**. Thanksgiving and joy are at the root of true generosity. We don’t tell people to be thankful as a transaction to receive their gifts. We start with thankfulness, because we have all been richly blessed by our Creator and our community, a community that chooses to follow God because we have been chosen and sustained by God. In times when stewardship campaigns can feel like an exercise in noticing all that we do not have, let thanksgiving turn you and your congregation toward the abundance of what God has already provided and trust that God will guide, provide, and equip you to live, work, and rest as the body of Christ planted just where you are for a time such as this.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement.

Lisa is also the co-lead of the Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God’s Children initiative.

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