

25

Oct

Tested

Always Give Thanks

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

People who have been in the church a long time may hear the same words and assume they know what they mean, when in fact, we could all use a refresher on what Paul is and is not doing in this passage (see Preaching Notes). So, as worship planners, how do we keep everyone engaged?

REFERENCES

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Matthew 22:34-46

COLORS

Green

Planning Worship

Focus text: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Worship planners, let me say upfront, moving from “chosen” to “tested” is hard. People who have been harmed by the church hear “God tests our hearts...” and are likely plotting their escape. People who have been in the church a long time may hear the same words and assume they know what they mean, when in fact, we could all use a refresher on what Paul is and is not doing in this passage (see Preaching Notes). So, as worship planners, how do we keep everyone engaged? How

do we provide the safe space and the brave space to explore what Paul is talking about in today's passage?

First, we create a safe space by reminding ourselves of the truth of who God is and who God calls and empowers us to be. We recall how God chooses us in the call to worship. We sing of God's never-failing, always-active love. We pray for one another and our world in the context of God's faithfulness to listen to our pain and to act for the flourishing of all creation. We prepare the congregation for the possibility that the scripture may hit a few buttons, but we're going to wrestle with it, not just accept easy, surface-level readings.

Then we create a brave space by encouraging vulnerability *with boundaries*, critical thinking, and mindfulness. This is a place where the preacher and, possibly, the worship leader/liturgist will do much of the heavy lifting. We have to admit the harmful ways passages of scripture have been used, endeavor to ask hard questions of God and the Bible, and expect that we are all doing our best and none of us has the full picture. That's why we need one another! But we do all of this with boundaries in place. We don't expect others to agree with us, but we do expect others to address our disagreements with charity and respect. We may leave the worship space with more questions than answers. This is not an invitation to blame those who lead worship, but an opportunity to listen for what God might be saying to us. Brave spaces welcome critical thinking—unpacking the text, being curious and open to new ways to read the same words, and examining multiple viewpoints. To do all of this, we have to be mindful. So, perhaps you begin and end proclamation with a time of silent meditation or a guided practice for paying attention to our bodies, our breathing, and the space we inhabit together. It is difficult to be brave when we're distracted and disconnected from ourselves and from one another.

If you are in a season of stewardship, I encourage you to avoid the idea that God is somehow testing our giving. This can lead to a transactional understanding of faith that leans dangerously close to prosperity gospel teachings. Rather, give thanks that God who chooses us also empowers, encourages, and supports us in the growth of our faith, because that's what the testing is really about. God isn't grading us. God invites us, by grace, to join in the process of being molded and formed to be more like Christ, so that we may be a community of thanksgiving and generosity modeled after our generous Creator.

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.

//

Notice at collection

Your Privacy Choices

