

Prelude: "In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful"**[Women's Chorus]**

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,
in the Lord I will rejoice!
Look to God, do not be afraid.
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near,
lift up your voices, the Lord is near.

Gathering Thoughts:**[Beth Woelk]**

Welcome to worship with Grace Mennonite Church for October 11th, Thanksgiving Sunday. Happy Thanksgiving! It is good to be together in spirit as most of us listen, read, sing, pray and worship together from our own homes. Gratitude to Ted Kopp who is our sound technician and makes our recordings possible. What a gift to listen to and sing along with the musical selections offered by Annie Schulz and our Women's Chorus. As we continue "Walking Humbly Towards God" in our autumn worship theme, Pastor Doug Schulz will bring us a reflection encouraging us to recognize and return to the proven provisions that are supplied for us along life's path. And I, Beth Woelk, invite us all to join our hearts together now in this Call to Worship and Prayer.

Call to Worship & Prayer:

God of Abundance,
we gather together to recall your goodness.
In this time of harvest and thanksgiving,
we exult in the diversity and richness
of the Earth's colour, beauty and nourishment.
We give thanks also for the bountiful fruitfulness that resides in and among us.
We draw encouragement from one another's gifts and rejoice in the fullness of your
Love that flows between us.
In our time of worship this morning,
awaken us to your provisions for us
and move our hearts to respond to your grace.
In Christ's name we pray, Amen

Women's Chorus: "A Thanksgiving Prayer"

Thank you, Lord, for loving us all.
For your gifts both great and small,
for the faith which keeps us strong,
now we join in thankful song.

For the beauty all around,
every sight and every sound,
for the love and friendship we share,
Lord, we bow in thankful prayer

We gather together to share in God's blessings:
the colours of autumn, the blossoms of spring,
the gift of creation, the promise of salvation.
For all His many wonders our thanks now we bring.

Together we join in our song of thanksgiving,
with grateful rejoicing our voices we raise.
All people and nations unite in celebration,
To God be all honour and glory and praise!
Amen

Scripture: Psalm 23 (fr. *The Living Bible*)

[Beth Woelk]

1 Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need!

2-3 He lets me rest in the meadow grass and leads me beside the quiet streams.
He gives me new strength. He helps me do what honors him the most.

4 Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way.

5 You provide delicious food for me in the presence of my enemies. You have welcomed me as your guest; blessings overflow!

6 Your goodness and unfailing kindness shall be with me all of my life, and afterwards I will live with you forever in your home.

Prayers of the People: [Beth Woelk]

Compassionate One, the amount of suffering in our world appears to be insurmountable, but the amount of kindheartedness is equally vast. It is easy to forget this. Let us give thanks for those who embody your love and let us be willing to share it.

We are grateful for:

Persons who dedicate their livelihood to alleviate suffering in any form;

Researchers in science, medicine, psychology, and other disciplines who study and offer ways of treating suffering of body, mind and spirit;

Directors, staff members, and participants of programs worldwide who focus on developing compassionate presence and altruistic action to alleviate suffering;

Leaders of faith who both preach and live the tenets of a compassionate life;

Teachers, parents, grandparents, daycare providers, staff at youth centers, and all who interact with children in a respectful and reverent manner;

Those who tirelessly walk alongside the lonely, homeless, forgotten and imprisoned, war-wearied, immigrated, prostituted and other marginalized individuals;

Politicians and government leaders who consistently keep the needs of suffering people as one of their basic guidelines in decision-making;

Persons who recognize and tend to the concerns of Earth's creatures and natural world;

Children whose generosity and sensitive concern for others leads them to reach out in friendship and kindness;

Wounded ones whose spirit is loving and large enough to offer forgiveness to those who have hurt them;

The countless men and women whose daily efforts to ease the suffering of others goes unnoticed, but makes a significant difference in the lives of people with mental, emotional, physical and spiritual distress.

Compassionate One, you hear the cries of the world; we are grateful to you for showing us how to be with those who suffer. Thank you for your bountiful kindness offered to our world through people of selfless endeavor. How grateful we are that we can join them in being your loving heart and hands. May we go forward with expanded gratitude and renewed inspiration to be a compassionate presence.

And now we also offer up the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, saying:

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Columbia, pastoring my first congregation. A group of us liked mountain-hiking. On the day I'm remembering, our goal was to scale The Black Tusk, a jagged strato-volcano in Garibaldi Provincial Park with a peak 2319 meters (7500') above sea level. From where we parked our vehicles, it was about a 15 km hike of varying slope intensity as we trudged upwards toward the base of The Tusk, from which there was a 500' very steep climb to the summit.

Well, we never made it. When we got to that steep, narrow last section, there was a tour group of dozens of nervous would-be peak-pilgrims coming down one-at-a-time in painstakingly slow fashion complaining about people 'frozen in fear' farther up the path. Well, some of us in my group had evening appointments back in Vancouver. So, abandoning our goal of reaching the jagged tooth-tip of the celebrated dark mountain, we had to turn and tramp those 15 km back to the cars, and proceed home on the scenic-but-scary Sea-to-Sky Highway. It was a good day nevertheless.

Looking back, I'm not that disappointed about our curtailed trip. Because another thing I remember is the lesson I learned from the oldest climber in our group, a fellow in his mid-50s who I saw as a real Mountain Methuselah then! He was fit as a cougar, sure-footed as a mountain goat. At one point on the trek up, we came to a broad V-shaped meadow that stretched out before us two or three kms. It had several different paths we could make out on it: one went straight ahead along the valley floor until it disappeared to the right around the base of a lesser peak we knew we had to get behind to finally arrive at our destination; another path led toward a higher ledge also on the right side about halfway up the barrier in front of us; and yet another path aimed upward much more steeply to a gap in a narrow outcropping on the left side and then disappeared behind this intermediate peak.

I asked my 'old' friend: "So, which path is best?" He said: "It doesn't matter. They all end up in the same place. The more important question is: Do you have the right supplies for these pathways? Do you have reserves of stamina? Are your boots good for the rockier terrain? Do you have enough water and snacks for the long haul? Is your mind prepared for either challenge - the tedium of the long gradual path, or the possible terror of cliff-edge crawling and scrabbling on the higher ways? It's all about what your provisions are, physical and psychological. What do you have with you? What do you have within you?" I won't forget that sort of sermon-on-the-mount.

My sermon today is called "Proven Life-Path Provisions". The peak point, so to speak, that I hope to make is that for whatever path we are on in our spiritual and ethical life journey, there are provisions given to us, especially from the Bible. The texts we read today - the always-inspiring and comforting 23rd Psalm and the powerful personal guidance perspectives offered by Paul in Philipppians - are examples of provisions for the Christian life. Do you and I need secure footwear and

enriching nourishment for the faith journey? Listen to the balance and energy in these verses:

Psalm 23: Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need! Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way. Your goodness and unfailing kindness shall be with me all of my life, and afterwards I will live with you forever in your home.

Philippians 4: Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

It was David, a young man being hunted down by the going-insane king Saul, that wrote about being fearless in the valley of death. And Paul, talking about the peace of God, is writing from prison in Rome not long before his execution at the hands of the raging emperor Nero. These scripture texts come from people living in the worst, most dangerous, twists-and-turns of their lives. Yet they speak about finding from God exactly what they need.

Lately I've been reading news articles which express concern that November's US election could be chaotic. Will violence break out between polarized extremists from either side of the political landscape down there? Will leadership unify in calling for peace and good order. At the risk of spiritualizing what would be a horrific situation if armed, radicalized militias open fire in the streets, I'm reminded that biblical texts such as we've read here today provide the best footing at all times, no matter what.

My father's life was full of tough losses and challenges, but he'd always say something like... "Whatever is going on today, the Golden Rule is the only way." The teachings of Jesus provide what we need to keep us on the road of faith and effective living. True enough, life is not a painless journey. At times and places "the road rises up to smack our faces!" But faith that can keep us going... keep us trusting, serving, giving, supporting, loving... Even loving enemies, Jesus said. And isn't it so true that the most difficult twists and turns or deepest valleys in the life-path can provide rich gifts of God's presence, power and peace as the Spirit of God gets us through rough days, and equips us to help others through tough stuff, too.

Liz Janzen, formerly of Niagara area, has authored several books of adventure and discovery gained through motorcycle-riding. Distressing times in her life provided lessons to learn. In her book *Women, Motorcycles and the Road to Empowerment*, she says: "I...discovered that my...mission was to [help] others...push through their own barriers, discover their own power and thrive." Motorcycling led her to teach riding, to take groups on long journeys of personal growth. She began to write, and it helped her come to appreciate her Mennonite heritage as she took her ancestors

with her on her shoulders, she says, on months-long motorbike ventures into Western Canada. Doing this, she treks through her history, her faith roots, her past struggles in the church, her wrestling with being a woman in a chauvinistic world. She develops a refreshing spiritual vision, and is now so grateful for many opportunities to meet new friends on an her always revitalizing journeys.

Ok, none of us at this stage of our existence wants to try motor-biking in hopes of discovering roads to a richer spiritual life before we can't drive at all anymore, let alone walk, or even breathe! But are we prepared to challenge ourselves with an important question: How am I doing with my spiritual life? Do I need to rev it up a bit? What provisions do I already have to guide and energize my faith-life step-by-step, day-by-day? What new roads of self-realization and God-consciousness can I take? And how can I share that with others - family, friends, neighbours, the world 'out there'?

I can't fully explain how rich it is week-by-week to work with Annie and Beth in weaving together songs and Scriptures and sermons into worship services. It's humbling to believe that what we are doing is giving a word of hope, and the light of wisdom, to encourage the spirits of this congregation and any others who might listen in as we all travel this threatening COVID-times trail together. I'm very thankful to be part of a church which believes that heartfelt fuel is supplied when we engage the words of the Bible, especially those that point ultimately to the message of Jesus as our true hope for a joyful journey throughout life to the very end.

Perhaps my story of mountain-climbing and the illustration of motorcycle-riding amount to not much more than sentimentalism in the face of very rough struggles people might be facing here at Grace, and all over the planet. But I can insist that you and I - at Thanksgiving, and always - can be so grateful we have the necessities to comfort us on our life-path with faith, and to compel us to follow Jesus humbly, joyfully, as we travel forward by God's grace.

I end this reflection with an invitation: Do take advantage of the Bible texts listed in our weekly memo. Read them. Or use some kind of daily devotional guide if you don't already. The journey to the sky offers many paths. The most important thing is to have what we need with us, and within us. May Jesus keep us climbing! AMEN

Hymn of Response: “In Thanksgiving Let Us Praise Him” [Women’s Chorus]

From the first bright light of morning, To the last warm glow of dusk;
Every breath we take is sacred, For it is God’s gift to us.
In thanksgiving, let us praise Him, In thanksgiving, let us sing
Songs of praise and adoration, To our gracious Lord and King.

