

Psalm 111

Praise the Lord!

- 1 I thank the Lord with all my heart  
in the company of those who do right, in the congregation.
- 2 The works of the Lord are magnificent;  
they are treasured by all who desire them.
- 3 God's deeds are majestic and glorious.  
God's righteousness stands forever.
- 4 God is famous for his wondrous works.  
The Lord is full of mercy and compassion.
- 5 God gives food to those who honor him.  
God remembers his covenant forever.
- 6 God proclaimed his powerful deeds to his people  
and gave them what had belonged to other nations.
- 7 God's handiwork is honesty and justice;  
all God's rules are trustworthy—
- 8 they are established always and forever:  
they are fulfilled with truth and right doing.
- 9 God sent redemption for his people;  
God commanded that his covenant last forever.  
Holy and awesome is God's name!
- 10 Fear of the Lord is where wisdom begins;  
sure knowledge is for all who keep God's laws.  
God's praise lasts forever!

## Romans 13: 8-14 - Love Fulfills the Law

8\_10 Don't run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along. The law code—don't sleep with another person's spouse, don't take someone's life, don't take what isn't yours, don't always be wanting what you don't have, and any other "don't" you can think of—finally adds up to this: Love other people as well as you do yourself. You can't go wrong when you love others. When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is love.

11\_14 But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day\_by\_day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing huge debt you owe to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. [When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is love.] Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

With the news flooded with hate

and hurting and fear, we wonder, what has become of us? Where do we go from here? I believe, in spite of all of this, there are many more working for peace and justice. So we must not only watch from the sidelines. We must act. We are called to love and to pay that love forward again and again.

There are many examples of Paying it forward ... Someone does a kindness.... that you were not expecting. Your bridge toll is paid by the person in front of you in line. Your neighbor offers to mow your lawn after he has finished his own, out of the blue. You are surprised when a check comes in the mail as a thank you for something you did just because you wanted to. Or just like what I experienced a few days ago, a friend offered to pay for my lunch as we were both getting out our money. These are acts of love and kindness that mean a lot, because they are unexpected, maybe even unearned, much like God's love and grace. And we need this reminder more than ever when

horrible, hurtful things happen. We need this reminder this morning.

In our scripture this morning, Paul is reminding us of the priceless value of love in our lives. We have no other debts to worry about but to respond to life and our relationships from a place of love. When we let loving be the focus of lives, our lives are full, our true needs are met.

In Paul's letters, he is often trying to explain what it means to be a follower of the Jesus Way. The newly converted had many years of bad habits and doing things the way they'd always done them. So, it was hard to change, it IS hard to change. And Paul wasn't right there with them to reinforce the message. I know first hand how tough it can be to get a point across even when we are standing next to each other, let alone from a distance. In my last years of teaching, I taught mostly online classes through SRJC. Without face to face contact, it can be even tougher some times to clearly explain the process or the

information we want to impart through written communication alone. They don't see my facial expression when assignments are turned in late.... again...

Misunderstandings can happen with emails or texts. We don't have the body language, the inflections....

I suspect Paul has heard through the grapevine that the new Christians in Rome were not fully understanding yet.... They were not getting it.... and were still continuing in their old ways - "carousing and drunkenness, immorality.... dissension and jealousy." He sent letters full of guidance and instruction, at least some of which we are fortunate to have today. Because we need reminders too.

His message this morning? All the laws come down to just one vital action. It's all about love. Love is enough. Loving others fulfills the law.... and God's plan for us. Love is the answer.

In Psalm 111 as with so many of them, the psalmist is singing God's praises,

1 I thank the Lord with all my heart...

2 The works of the Lord are magnificent;

And treasured...

3 God's deeds are majestic and glorious....

The Lord is full of mercy and compassion.

5 ... God remembers his covenant forever.

7 God's handiwork is honesty and justice

We, too, sing or shout our appreciation for God in our midst.

One of the best ways that we demonstrate our praise of God and the many blessings we have received is by being of service to others, following the way of Jesus and doing unto others.

Sometimes the very hardest person to love is ourselves. We are asked to love our neighbor as ourselves. No wonder we sometimes do a pretty poor job of this. What are we doing to love ourselves? How are we treating ourselves with

kindness? Are we getting plenty of sleep? Eating well? Getting exercise? Are we accepting ourselves and our imperfections, remembering that we are all beloved children of God? Or do we give ourselves a hard time. Do we do too much and fail to set healthy limits?

Paul is saying to us this morning through Eugene Peterson inspired interpretation in the Message, “Don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day\_by\_day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God... Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, we must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!”

To me this means.... don't waste

time, girl.... get up and get going.  
And let love, let God be your guide  
and your focus today.

I had very memorable experience  
that showed me the power of love  
for myself and others. As it turned  
out on that day in Boston, I had  
some lessons to learn. I had been at  
a training for nearly a week. A  
good week, but now I was tired,  
drained and ready to go home. I  
had planned the timing of the return  
flight with the hope that I would  
have a chance to connect with East  
coast family members beforehand.  
What if they had not been  
available. They were. We met for  
breakfast and a long, comfortable  
conversation which allowed us to  
check in on all the latest family  
news. Then they generously drove  
me to Logan Airport through the  
busy streets of Boston, and dropped  
me off. I was content and proud of  
myself to have arranged this with  
plenty of extra time for a leisurely,  
relaxed wait before my plane's  
departure. Once in the terminal, I  
immediately realized that I had left  
my bag with the ticket inside at the

restaurant. All of a sudden, I didn't have so much time. Immediately shifting to panic, I called the restaurant and was assured that they were holding my bag. I caught a taxi to retrieve my ticket, all the while worrying about whether I would be able to get back to the airport in time to catch my flight home. How could I be so stupid and forgetful?!

Before very long at all on this sunny Saturday, we were locked into painfully slow traffic. Not only was it a beautiful July day in Boston, but everyone seemed to be on their way to Fenway Park to see the baseball game. The driver got caught up in my panic and anxiously swore when a road he expected to use to get around the congestion turned out to be closed for construction.

When I am stressed out and not feeling in "control" of a situation, the panic and discomfort can be intense. In this frame of mind and in an unfamiliar city, I even began to allow myself to think the worst -

that the driver might be taking me on a “wild goose chase”. How quickly I moved to a place of judgment to deal with my own feelings of frustration and impotence.

Then..... thankfully, something clicked inside me. I like to believe that God nudged me back to a place of loving acceptance. I took a breath and began to calm down, telling myself everything would be okay. No matter what, I could take this opportunity to see what was going on around me. It really was an absolutely glorious day. I am after all on my way back to the comforts of home and familiar routines. And if I miss my plane, there will be another. Who knows? I may even get a new flight that would get me home sooner.

Well, in nothing short of a miracle, the driver made it through the intense traffic to the restaurant. When I picked up my bag, the young waiter said that maybe this was happening for a reason. I couldn't imagine what that might

be, but I was back in the cab on my way to the airport. With a much improved attitude, giving myself to whatever would happen, I relaxed and finally took the time to meet the human being who was my driver and began to ask him some questions.

He is originally from Eritrea and now works weekends driving a cab. He told me he was going to a local university and had nearly completed work for his degree in physics. Physics! And with excitement in his voice, he told me how much he loved the science! Wow! I let him know that I was impressed with his dedication. I asked him if he was here with family and he beamed as he told me he was married and had a 1 ½ year old daughter. He leaned over and proudly pulled her picture out of the passenger side visor and showed me. Wow! School, job, and family. I asked him what he hoped to do when he was finished with his degree. He wants to go on to get a master's degree and then go back to Eritrea to help his people. He asked about my family,

and was interested in my sons and their career aspirations.

I asked him his daughter's name and what it meant - It means "goodwill". He was a man of goodwill who wanted to give back to his country, to be of service, and pay it forward. And he was also a miracle worker because we arrived back at the airport with 10 minutes to spare. I thanked him happily and generously. This leg of my journey had taught me about patience and goodwill.

When I was checking in at the counter, I mentioned to the man that I was relieved to have made it back in time. I couldn't believe I had been so forgetful and I had very nearly missed the plane. Hearing a little about my plight, he tried to put me in an available window seat, but the computer wouldn't let him do it, so he called the gate. The plane had been boarded and was very near take off, but he said into the phone, "She's had a very rough morning. Can we help her out?" His comment to me was, "Oh I think you will like the

seat she found.” I said, “You didn’t...” He just smiled. I was upgraded to first class! I had never flown first class before and probably never will again! I thanked him and openly wept with relief to just be at the airport in time, then I hurried to the waiting plane.

That day, I benefitted. People who travel first class really get service! They give you wide, plush comfortable seats and warm wash cloths to clean up before eating. Don’t we all deserve to be given first class service? My New England family gave me first class treatment to make time for my visit on my last day in Boston. As did the cab driver. The young man at the restaurant who held onto my bag and kept it safe showed me love and acceptance. The sensitive caring man at the airport ticket counter who treated me with extra kindness .... I was blessed. And when I stepped out of my fears, I was opened to see that these people I had encountered were all a

blessing to me. They had all paid it forward in some way... offering the best they could to me, a person they didn't even know, ... because it was the right thing to do. It was the loving and kind thing to do.

Rachel Remen writes, "Service comes from the heart.... When you serve, your work itself will sustain you, renew you, and bless you. Service is not about fixing life, outwitting life, manipulating life, controlling life, or struggling to gain mastery over life. When we serve, we discover that all of life is holy."

As Paul reminded the Romans, "let us put aside the deeds of darkness [our doubts, fears, judgments, resentments] and instead, put on the armor of light" Clothe ourselves in the Jesus way.

I frequently find myself asking the popular question, "What would Jesus say.... or do?" Time and Time again.... through scripture we hear him offering love, kindness,

compassion, acceptance not just to some, to an elite group, but to all. Jesus would pay it forward.... he did pay it forward from the deep, satisfying wellspring of the love he felt from God.

I got the message in the taxi! We can't go wrong when we love and accept ourselves..... and from that place of strength and comfort.... love others. Even when we are quaking with fear, when we are concerned for the safety of others. Or when anger blinds us to the humanity of others, every day, we are called to pay it forward, to love. "Love is the fulfillment of the law."

As Paul wrote ... "We can't afford to waste a minute, we must not squander these precious daylight hours... Get out of bed.... don't linger... Dress yourself in Christ and be up and about." The taxi driver's daughter's name meant "Goodwill." today, like any other day... and not like any other day... May we too offer good will and love to all, as we pay it forward.

Please join me in prayer

Loving God, we are so grateful for your presence in our lives. When we forget, remind us that we are called to serve, even when this takes us to difficult places, even when we're angry or scared.

Strengthen us in our resolve to follow the Jesus way that you have set before us. For all life is holy.... and all deserve love. May we be your hands and feet and heart for those we meet today, spreading love and kindness and compassion, standing up for justice, and offering hope for tomorrow.