

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota
 December 4, 2016

Psalm 146
 Psalm 147:1-11
 Romans 15:13
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

ADULT MESSAGE

What do you say about God? Here's what the psalmists in our texts for today say about God:

- God made everything.
- God keeps faith forever.
- God executes justice for the oppressed.
- God gives food to the hungry.
- God sets the prisoner free.
- God opens the eyes of the blind.
- God lifts up those who are bowed down.
- God heals the brokenhearted.
- God binds up the wounds of those who are hurting.
- God watches over strangers.
- God upholds the widows and orphans.
- God loves those who trust God.
- God brings the way of the wicked to ruin.

Did they miss anyone? Is there anyone that falls outside of God's care and concern? God is so great and so powerful. Yet God is also so close and so caring. How do you see God moving in your world?

Even 800 years before the time of Jesus, God's people saw God as close to them in their needs, in their hopes and dreams. This understanding of a loving, caring, faithful God caused the psalmist to cry out, "**Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.**" How long is a life? I'm 64. This church is 125 years old. The Christian church has been going for 2,000 years. God has been moving in this world since God first brought form and purpose out of chaos in creation. The psalmist says God will be moving forever. The psalmist says, "**Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.**" How long will your life be? How happy are you? Where do you find help in trouble? Where do you find hope for the future? Like with the psalmist, do God's praises rise up from your heart too? From your lips? From your actions?

Here's what Jesus told his first followers, "**For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.**" "**Indeed,**" Jesus said, "**God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**"

There's our hope. God's love for us. Faith in Christ brings salvation – a love, trust relationship with God. A love, caring relationship with each other and the earth. God gives faith. God forgives our sin, doubt, unfaithfulness. And that sets us free to love God back, love the neighbor, love the creation and to live each and all of our days to the fullest. **When we know and believe deeply in our hearts** that we are and always will be cared for by God, we **can live without fear**. Not only are we rescued from fearing God, fearing the world, fearing our future. We are given the possibility of **hope**.

Here's what the Apostle Paul told the early Christians after Jesus rose from the dead. "**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**" Do you hear it? We worship a **hope filled God**. And God moves, by way of God's Holy Spirit, **to fill each and all of us with hope**. And **hope gives birth to joy and peace** in our lives! Dear sister and brother in Christ, when we let go of trying to take care of ourselves. When we let go and fully trust God to love and care for us. We **start to become hopeful** for **ourselves**, for **other people**, for this **world**, for our **future here in this world** and **forever in heaven!**

Over my many years as a pastor, some of the people that I've known have had the **least possessions** and the **most difficult of circumstances** and **yet** have **known the peace of God** and **because of that** have **been the most joyful and loving people around**. I've learned that it's not what we have that gives us hope. It is who we have. Or even more so, it is Who has us that gives peace and hope now and forever. **Peace and hope** are **God's Christmas gifts** for us again this year. Those same gifts are ready for us to live in and to use every day of our lives, and on the last day our best friend and brother, Jesus, will carry us home.

Dr. Gerhard Frost, my old seminary professor, shares the following account of an elderly woman as she left this world. He entitles it:

“TAKK FOR ALT”

She was not quite ninety-seven when she died. One who waited at her side heard her say it: “Takk for alt” “Thank you for everything.” It was here home-going word to God.

Like a good guest she addressed her Host. She spoke as one well-taught, well-taught by life, by memory and expectation!

To be gift-conscious is to be wise; to know whom to thank is grace indeed. To know the gift and love the Giver, to have learned life’s dearest lesson, is to be rich toward God.

“Thank you for everything,” that Norwegian phrase, doesn’t just mean thanks for little stuff, this or that. It means thanks for “everything” – all that is needed for a good life here in God’s world and in the kingdom of heaven to come.

Just before my mom died, I leaned over her bedside and spoke into her ear. “Mom, remember the picture of Jesus carrying the little lamb in our old church in Alborn? Remember how you told me that I was that little lamb, how we all are that little lamb? Well, Mom, today Jesus is carrying you. He is bringing you home to heaven. Dad and Grandma and Grandpa Ostman will be waiting there for you. God has a special spot saved for you at God’s banquet table. And everyone will be so glad to see you.” It was then that Mom spoke her last words, “So beautiful.”

“So beautiful?” Did that mean she appreciated the beauty of the promise that I spoke? Did that mean that she was getting a glimpse of God’s coming kingdom? Either way, Mom left this world living in the peace of God and with plenty of hope for the future. That’s how I want to leave this world too. And that’s the gift that Jesus brings for each and all of us – peace and hope.

Here at First Lutheran Church, in the year ahead, may we grow in our love for each other, each as parts of this community of faith, sisters and brothers of Jesus, children of God. May we grow in our compassion as we open our hearts and minds to truly help and care for each other, for the

people around us here in Aitkin, and even for people in far distant corners of God's world. And may we grow in **hope** as we trust in God who is the source and giver of our lives, our hope and our salvation.

You being here today is:

- Your praise and thanksgiving to God,
- Your partnership in Jesus' mission to love and save our world,
- Your support of this faith family.

Thank you for being a **vital part** of the Body of Christ that calls First Lutheran our faith home. Thank you for the **time, energy, money, heart** and **soul** that you pour into Jesus' mission which we share together here at First Lutheran. What you write on your commitment card today, what you put into our offering plates each week, will impact greatly upon what we will be able to accomplish together in the year ahead. I am **excited to see** what our **Hopeful God** will be **doing among us**. **Are you hopeful too?** Thank you and thanks be to God. Amen.