

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Psalm 100
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 June 11, 2017

KIDS' MESSAGE

- Kids, what is your **favorite kind of candy**? Vegetable? Fruit? Meat? God gave all of these to you as gifts.
- What is your **favorite sport**? Book? Movie? Day of the week? God gave all of these to you as gifts.
- What is your **favorite toy**? Animal? Bird? Fish? God gave all of these to you as gifts.
- Who is your **favorite teacher**? Best friend? Favorite relative other than your parents or grandparents? Who is your favorite pastor? I'm the only one you have! God gave all of these to you as gifts.
- Where is your **favorite place to visit**? Favorite room where you live? Favorite shirt? God gave all of these to you as gifts.
- Who is your **favorite part of God** – Father, Son or Holy Spirit? God gave Godself to you as a gift.

Wow, God has certainly given you many wonderful gifts. Are you thankful to God? Being here today is one way of saying "**Thank you**" to God. Are there other ways of thanking God for loving us enough to give us all of these wonderful gifts?

Prayer/Praise/singing/helping others/telling others about Jesus/taking good care of God's world/treating others like God loves them too...

God gives us today to live in God's world. Every day we live here is a gift from God. **What gift will God give to us when we die**? God will give us **new life**, new body, in heaven with God and with all of God's people forever! Wow! **The best gift of all, God saves until the last. Thanks be to God.** Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Forty-two years ago, I preached my first sermon ever. I was at Luther Seminary in St. Paul and taking my first seminary preaching class. **Dr. Sheldon Tostengaard** was the professor. He and several students listened as I spoke. My sermon illustration was about being **lost deep in the middle of a big spruce swamp** during deer season. That swamp was located on county land across the lake from the house where I grew up. Beyond it were miles of woods and no roads. That swamp was dark and confusing with a cloudy sky overhead. Mushy, rough and uncertain footing stretched out all around me. I had no idea which direction I had to go in order to find home. And it was getting late in the day.

Then, as I preached, I am sure, I went on to tell about **Jesus being the One who rescues us** from the **dark and scary places of life**. I said my “**Amen**” and sat down. **Dr. Tostengaard** looked up at me, slowly shook his head from side to side, and said, “**Humph, typical melancholy Scandinavian.**” I guess maybe I was born and raised to talk about the difficult times of life. And I still do it to this very day. We northern Europeans can get kind of glum sometimes. My lost-in-the-spruce-swamp story was true. Have you ever been in a big spruce swamp? They can run on for miles. Every direction looks the same. I had no compass. I didn’t know where home was. I was getting scared.

Then Mom’s horn sounded. What? Every evening when we were out deer hunting, Mom would faithfully go from house to car and use the horn to sound three long honks that echoed across the lake and into the woods. Then she would wait a minute and do it again. Three long honks. That was her signal for husband, sons and other relatives. “**Home is over here. It’s time to come in now.**” Mom’s horn honking was a signal that **safety, supper and love** awaited my return. It meant that there was a place, close at hand, where I could **rest and be renewed** for another day’s hunt. When you’re **lost in the woods**, when you’re **struggling through life**, when you are **rejoicing at the wonder of this creation**, when you’re **just plain glad to be alive** - there’s **nothing more important**, nothing more life-giving than **knowing where home and love are.**

That's what our **Psalm 100** text is all about. It's about knowing **who you are**, **whose you are** and **where you will always belong** and **be welcomed**. The Psalmist, in five short verses, gives **seven calls** for us to **praise**, **worship** or **thank God**. Why should we do that? The Psalmist assures us that:

1. This world is the loving work of Creator God.
2. God also lovingly created us humans.
3. We walk daily through a creation that God still loves.
4. God gifts us with God's steadfast love and faithfulness now and forever.

God is our home and God loves us. That's the best foundation there is to build your life and future on. **God is your home and God loves you**. **No matter what happens**. These are **amazing gifts** to **thank and praise God for**.

We were created to **praise, worship and thank** God. **God doesn't need** our praise, worship and thanksgiving. **We need to praise God**. When we praise God, we do two things:

1. We **give ourselves to God fully** as we respond to God's love with our trust. **"You are the source of all that is good in my life, O Lord!"**
2. By praising God to others, we **give God to them**. **"When I ran into this problem in my life, God helped me. I bet God can help you too."**

The creation and we - **everything belongs to God**. When we **admire the sunset**, in our hearts, or with our lips - we are praising God. When we **complement** our spouse or the waiter for a good meal - we are praising God. When we **wish a good day** or a safe journey to a stranger - we are praising God. When we **bow our heads in a prayer of thanksgiving** for the new baby, for the recovery from surgery, for the new job - we are praising God. When we **do our best** at school, at work or in helping a neighbor - we are praising God. When we **dare to speak for what is good and right** - we are praising God. When we are **speechless with awe** over the love and care that some other person has given us - we are praising God. When we **fall asleep in our bed** at night, we are **joining the whole creation in trusting God with our lives and salvation**. We are joining the whole creation in praising **God who is so loving and faithful** that **we can rest in God's tender embrace without fear** of what the night might bring.

This whole world belongs to God. Every person in this world belongs to God. You belong to God. God will always be loving and faithful for this whole creation and for each and all of us. That is something to be thankful for. That is something to build your life upon, now and forever.

Dr. Gerhard Frost, another of my old seminary professors, sees it like this.

“Takk for Alt”

(Bless My Growing, p. 96, Augsburg Press, 1974)

She was not quite ninety-seven when she died. One who waited by her side heard her say it: **“Takk for alt” “Thank you for everything.”** It was her 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.

Can you hear the horn honking? Three long honks. Over 50 years ago, it was my mom signaling for me. Today, it’s God signaling for each and for all of us. Three long honks - **“Home is here. Love is here. It’s time to come in now.”** **And for that we give thanks to God.**

Please join me in singing, and don’t worry if you can’t carry a tune in a bucket. It will be a **joyful noise to God.** And if you absolutely can’t sing, lip synch. Or, if you absolutely can’t lip synch, sing in your heart. Let’s sing, **ELW #885.**

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise God, all creatures here below; praise God above, ye heavenly hosts; praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.