

## **His Love Endures Forever**

### **Psalm 136**

Good Morning Church Family,

It is good to be here with you this weekend to celebrate Thanksgiving. I'm always thankful for this church and all of you, but I'm feeling especially thankful this year. Your love and kindness to my family in the midst of changes in the church is such a gift, so thank you.

I've always had a special fondness for Canadian Thanksgiving, because it falls at a time of year when the trees are all in colour, it is warm enough for a walk, but the changing of seasons feels exciting and hopeful (most of the time anytime). The power of selective Canadian memory helps to forget all the Thanksgiving snowstorms I've experienced over the last 18 years.

When I was in college, I took a course on the Psalms. One of the assignments for the course was that each student had to memorise a Psalm of 20 or more verses and be able to write out the Psalm, including proper punctuation, from memory. Can you guess what the most popular Psalm chosen by students in that class was? Yup, Psalm 136, because after every line comes the refrain, "His love endures forever!" Cut down on

your memorising work by 50%

Aside from its easier to memorise qualities, Psalm 136 is a unique piece of biblical poetry. It's not uncommon for a Psalm to use a repeating line, but it's rare to find one that repeats one line throughout the entire Psalm. I think there's something unique going here, and something that is very applicable to our giving thanks this morning. This chapter can provide us with a framework of what to praise God for in our lives.

Last week, we talked about the Spiritual Practice, the Spiritual Discipline of noticing the Kingdom of God, or God at work in our everyday lives. We can also apply that principle to thankfulness, giving God praise and thanks for the things in our everyday lives. I know that it's easy for me to forget to thank God for the seemingly ordinary things of my life, the things that have always been there, the things that have been part of my story for so long that I can't remember life before those things. And if we feel a little "stuck" on what to praise and thank God for, Psalm 136 is full of helpful suggestions.

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

*His faithful love endures forever.*

Give thanks to the God of gods.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

Give thanks to the Lord of lords.

*His faithful love endures forever."*

Here the Psalmist is offering praise to the name of God. This is the God, the one who is above all others. Praising the name of God feels a bit outdated, we no longer live in a culture where there is an idea of competing gods or even multiple gods. At least not in the most literal sense. We now live in a culture that is “flat”, where nothing is divine or sacred any longer. Yet we can praise the one who turns our gaze heavenward, the one who is in control, not us. The one who is over and above money and fame. Power and prestige, kingdoms and rulers. The one who we try to know more fully even as God fully knows us. At Rachel Wallace’s ordination, she was offering her thank yous and she said the most beautiful, striking statement, “Mom and Dad, thank you for introducing me to Jesus.” “Thank you for introducing me to Jesus.” For each of us here, somewhere along our life journey, someone introduced us to the name of Jesus. Somehow we know the name of the Lord, we are acquainted with the God of Gods and the Lord of Lords, and that IS something to be thankful for! Perhaps it was a parent, grandparent, pastor, a friend, a spouse? We can thank God that someone introduced us to Jesus, this was not an accident, but a kindness from the Lord.

“Give thanks to him who alone does mighty miracles.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

Give thanks to him who made the heavens so skillfully.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

Give thanks to him who placed the earth among the waters.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

Give thanks to him who made the heavenly lights—

*His faithful love endures forever.*

the sun to rule the day,

*His faithful love endures forever.*

and the moon and stars to rule the night.

*His faithful love endures forever.”*

One “ordinary” direction that we can offer thankfulness to God is for creation.

Saskatchewan, for all the flack it receives for being boring and flat, is the place where I have seen the most miraculous skies. A place where we get to experience four seasons (even if they're not all equal in duration). My kids help me to cultivate this kind of thankful wonder at creation almost everyday. Last week, while we were with my parents, the kids and I went for a bike ride. The trees in Minnesota were in their full golden glory. It was an especially blustery afternoon, and the trees were cascading off the trees. The kids kept turning their faces in wonder as the leaves came off the trees in waves, swirling through the air on their way to the ground. At one point on our ride, Junia calls out, “Shhhhh! Be quiet!” “What?” “Be quiet! Listen!” The three of us hushed for a moment and I realised that Junia wanted us to listen to the sound of hundreds of dried leaves crinkling and crackling down the road in the wind. Spending time in creation, especially with kids, I think, invites us to take notice of the vast intricacies that God has created, and our place as beloved children within that cosmos. The 9 short verses of Psalm 8 capture this wonder and gratitude.

Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory

in the heavens.

Through the praise of children and infants

you have established a stronghold against your enemies,

to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens,

the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars,

which you have set in place,

what is mankind that you are mindful of them,

human beings that you care for them?

You have made them a little lower than the angels

and crowned them with glory and honor.

You made them rulers over the works of your hands;

you put everything under their feet:

all flocks and herds,

and the animals of the wild,

the birds in the sky,

and the fish in the sea,

all that swim the paths of the seas.

Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The Lord is vast, and we are small. And sometimes, that reminder is exactly what I need to encourage a posture of thankfulness.

Give thanks to him who killed the firstborn of Egypt.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

He brought Israel out of Egypt.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

He acted with a strong hand and powerful arm.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

Give thanks to him who parted the Red Sea.[a]

*His faithful love endures forever.*

He led Israel safely through,

*His faithful love endures forever.*

but he hurled Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

Give thanks to him who led his people through the wilderness.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

In these verses, the Psalmist is reaching back to tell the story of God's rescue from Egypt - a rescue that was so crucial to Israel's own understanding of their identity. Have any of you ever felt rescued by God? I'm sure God has rescued me from many things or situations that I wasn't even aware of, but I can recall one time in my life where I distinctly FELT rescued by God. Early in our marriage, Taylor was unemployed for the better part of a year. I had a full time job, but the wages were enough to cover our living expenses, no savings, no money for emergencies. Taylor wanted to work, our finances needed him to work, but it just wasn't happening. The job market in the area was tough, and applications didn't turn into interviews, or interviews didn't turn into jobs. It was super demoralising. It seemed the only way that Taylor was going to get a job was for God to provide one for him. So we prayed. We worried. Our church prayed, and after a long time, the most perfect job for Taylor was

given. A job that he still has. A job that has provided financially for our family and also the flexibility to stay home with our kids and for me to pursue ministry. I'll never forget when he got the phone call from the HR department, letting him know the job was his. I felt rescued, saved from our circumstances, by God. Have you ever felt rescued by God? Let's give thanks for those spaces of rescue and redemption in our stories.

Give thanks to him who struck down mighty kings.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

He killed powerful kings—

*His faithful love endures forever.*

Sihon king of the Amorites,

*His faithful love endures forever.*

and Og king of Bashan.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

God gave the land of these kings as an inheritance—

*His faithful love endures forever.*

a special possession to his servant Israel.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

Just as God rescues, God also saves us. What is so compelling to me about Christianity is that God saves us FROM something and God saves us INTO something. We're saved from our sin and saved into life with Jesus. I think a lot of Christianity traditions, Anabaptism included, struggle with how to talk about being saved, or other salvific



language. American Evangelicalism has tied so much baggage around those ideas that it's hard to know how to talk about salvation, or even to want to talk about it. And what about those of us for whom we don't have much to be saved from? I'm so grateful that my life has been relatively unmarked by tragedy and darkness, but that gift can also make it harder to recognize my own need. A pastor friend of mine told me about a congregant in her previous church who told her, "I don't need to be saved from anything. I don't need saving." It's not uncommon to feel this way, even from time to time. Yet scripture makes it clear that we ARE in need of Saving. And that we're saved into a new life, a new identity found in Jesus. Ephesians 2:1-10, "Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. **7** So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so

none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

And the last section of Psalm 136 says this, "He remembered us in our weakness.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

He saved us from our enemies.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

He gives food to every living thing.

*His faithful love endures forever.*

Give thanks to the God of heaven.

*His faithful love endures forever."*

Friends, God cares for us. We have food (some of which is wafting deliciously from the kitchen right now), shelter and clothing. These are gifts from God. We are cared for by God through our friends, our family, and we hope and pray, through this church. Psalm 136 reminds us that there are so many reasons to thank God

The biggest reason of which is stitching each verse of this psalm together and each moment of this world together- The Faithful, Ever Enduring Love of God. Friends! We are loved by God! This love is the reason that God acts in all the ways laid out in his Psalm - God is made known to us, offers us this beautiful terrestrial ball to walk upon, rescues us and saves us and cares for us BECAUSE GOD LOVES US. And this, dear ones, is the greatest possible thing that we could give thanks for this Day. The love OF GOD. Deep,

rich, and full- never ending, enduring forever.

In the week leading up to our potluck and conversation about the future direction of this congregation, I was out walking the dog. And, as is often the case when I walk Fozzie, I was praying. Specifically, I was praying (and fretting) about the meeting. And a phrase came into my mind, clear and sharp, "I am held by the immutable love of God." "I am held by the immutable -that is unable to be changed-love of God." And that phrase stayed in my head, replaying often throughout my day, and always when I prayed for the church.

As a closing Thanksgiving gift, I offer that phrase to each of you -"You are held by the immutable love of God." Each of you. Each of your kids and grandkids. Your neighbours. You friends. Your sisters and brothers in Christ- We are held by the immutable love of God. It's stitched all around us, woven into every breath, every tear, every laugh. And it's all over our Scripture for this morning We are held by the immutable love of God. Thanks be to God.

Amen.