

## Praise the Lord, O My Soul

Sermon October 16, 2022 - Anniversary Sunday

**Scripture Reading:** Luke 17:11-19

**Golden Verse:** *“Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”* - Psalm 103:1-2

Today, we, the members of the Calvin family, have a very special reason to give thanks, praising our God.

More than sixty years ago, quite a few of our enthusiastic brothers and sisters had a desire to build a church in this place for the spiritual care of the people living in the area and for the glory of God. Their dreams and their enthusiasm started the movement to build our church. Their dream came true. They got the land, they built the church, and organized the congregation, and continued to provide all that a congregation needed to function well. We have a few members here who have seen and lived through the development of this church, and today remember the last more than sixty years, the initial touching zeal, the awakening life, the prayerful effort for new plans and ideas, the blooming springtime joy of faith, the blazing flame of first love, to the devotion of the initial handful of believers, to the rapidly building walls, to the moment when the organ was filling the building with amazing melodies. Today with them we truly confess to God today from the fullness of our hearts with the words of the psalm: “Bless the Lord, my soul, and his holy name.”

Today, first we thank God for those who dreamed the dream and those who implemented the plan. We are thankful for those who understood what God has placed on their heart and for obeying God’s call to build a church here. We thank the builders for making their dream a reality.

Today, we, who are here together, enjoying this amazing church building, also thank God for the fact that we are God’s people: we are a loving and living congregation; we are dear brothers and sisters, we belong together; and we are children of God received into grace by the merit of Jesus. We have a Father who loves us all equally. We have a Saviour who redeemed us all by his life and death.

Here today, as we celebrate the 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary, we thank God that we have a spiritual home here, we have a church community, and we have a home in heaven as a rich inheritance waiting for us.

Let's think about how many times the word of God was spoken here for 62 years: how many times has he invited us our Lord Jesus Christ to His table; how many times He has embraced us here within these walls with His renewing and empowering love.

Furthermore, today we give thanks to God for those people who received assurance of the forgiveness of their sins in this church. We give thanks for those who were worshipping here and were sustaining our church. We give thanks for those who listened to God's word here, who could feel the touch of God's blessed hand, the warmth of his heart, and the mysterious work of his Holy Spirit. We should say together: "Yes, bless my soul, bless the Lord a thousand times, and bless his holy name within me!"

The psalmist is urging his own soul to open up to praise God, to give thanks to the Lord. He does not say: "Let my lips bless the Lord", but like this: "Let my soul bless the Lord, and all my inmost being his holy name." Thanksgiving doesn't just mean that I fold my hands and say some kind of "thank you". It's more than that: to give thanks is to be grateful, so it's an attitude, a behaviour, a spiritual warmth that involves my whole being, and my whole heart.

Of course, thanksgiving can be and has to be expressed in words, as James is encouraging us: "*Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.*" James 5:13.

The most beautiful psalms are precisely those in which a grateful soul praises God for his goodness. And indeed, when our heart is full of gratitude, it is so good to pour it out in a beautiful psalm of praise. Just try to sing a song of praise, and you will see that your joy will multiply.

Gratitude can be expressed not only with words, but also with actions. We all know the way we can express our gratitude to God with actions. If we know somebody who is in some kind of trouble, we can stand by them and help them.

A question to all of us: Are you grateful to God?

Then please express your gratitude in a favour to your fellow people. God is praised over your gratitude, which you want to give to others in God's name. When someone is grateful to God, it always brings concrete joy to someone here on earth.

And true gratitude is not only expressed in one good deed, but actually the whole Christian life is nothing but thanksgiving. Gratitude must be a way of life for us. We cannot obligate God with good deeds to do something for us, but we are expressing how grateful we are for what we have received from God. Our life should be a life of service with a grateful heart for the divine gifts we have already received.

So when we talk about gratitude, we are talking about the basic position of our faith and our Christian attitude. Now someone might say: “What reason would I have to be so grateful to God, since I have so many problems and troubles in my everyday life. There is so much annoyance and inconvenience. My life is so gray and uneventful, and something good, something extremely gratifying, a lucky turn in life happens so rarely. No wonder, then, that my heart is so rarely filled with jubilant, great thanksgiving.”

I do believe that gratitude begins with experiencing extraordinary small gifts from God. We are often like children whose gratitude to their parents is only for the Christmas present or the extra pocket money, and otherwise their hearts are full of indignity, complaints, and grumpiness.

The main problem is that we almost always take for granted what we receive. We get day by day so many things and we cannot take them just for granted. We have to see how much God does for us and we have to be thankful. It would be good for us to realize that even the grayest everyday life is full of God’s gifts. The problem is that we are so used to God’s smaller and bigger favours that we take them for granted. What do we say to the giver? Nothing!

If we don’t show gratitude, we are just takers, getting everything from God.

Let’s look around us. And let’s realize what task or assignment we have to complete as we are thankful to God for having this amazing Church building and our congregation as our extended family.

Our first task is to continue to sustain this building and to maintain what we received from those who built this for us.

Secondly, in Cuba, in Moron, people are planning to build another church in a different area, in order to help people to find a church where they can worship God and where they can be nourished spiritually.

As we know, some members of St. Andrew's started this church. People from Moron, Cuba, would always remember that our church members were helping them to build and maintain their church. And what the most important is, God will remember your donations that you gave for his glory. Amen