

“OPEN-HANDED”
4:00 PM, NOV. 22, 2023
THANKSGIVING EVE
Pastor Tim Huber

Thanksgiving Day was drawing near, so a first grade teacher gave her class a typical Thanksgiving **assignment**: “Draw a **picture of something for which you are thankful**”. She knew most of the children in the class would be celebrating the holiday with turkey and other traditional trimmings, so she assumed that might be the subject of most of her students’ **art**. And it **WAS**...except for little **HENRY** who drew a **different** kind of picture. Henry also was a different kind of **boy**—the famous poem’s proverbial “**Wednesday’s child of woe**”—frail and unhappy. As the other children played at **recess**, Henry usually stood close by her side. She could only guess at the **pain** Henry felt behind those sad eyes. So, when asked to draw a picture of something for which he was **thankful**, Henry drew...a **HAND!** Nothing **else**...just an **EMPTY HAND**.

His minimalist, abstract image captured the imagination of the **other** students, as well. So, the teacher asked the class, “**Whose HAND could it BE?**” One child guessed it was the hand of a **farmer**, because **some** farmers raise **turkeys**. Another suggested a **police officer**, because the police protect and **care** for people. Still **others** guessed it was the hand of **God**, because God **feeds** us. The discussion went on until the teacher almost forgot the young artist **himself!** When the children had gone on to **other** assignments, she paused at Henry’s desk, bent down, and asked him whose hand it **WAS**. The little boy looked away and muttered softly, “**It’s YOURS, Teacher.**” She immediately recalled the many times she’d **taken Henry’s hand** and walked with him here or there...how often she’d said, “**Take my HAND, Henry; we’ll go OUTSIDE**” or “**Let me show you how to hold your pencil**” or “**Let’s do this together.**” And **so**, Henry was **MOST thankful** for his teacher’s **HAND!**

On this Thanksgiving Eve, King David’s **Psalm 145** also encourages us to think about **God’s hand** in **OUR** life, reminding us that His hand is always **THERE** for us...even when we might not even **SENSE** it!

Of **150** psalms in Scripture, this is the **only one** that has the title, “**A Psalm of PRAISE.**” And yet, this unique title eventually began to be used for the **ENTIRE** Book of Psalms by Old Testament believers who preferred to call it “**The Book of PRAISES.**” David says in vs 2, “**Every day I will praise You.**” Whether in good **OR** dark times, David would offer up **praise to God**...and as I looked at **Ps. 145**, I noticed **several ways** David alludes to the hand of God touching our daily lives, and thus giving **each** of us good cause to **also** set aside time to **praise God** each and every day!

For ONE thing, because God is ALMIGHTY, He’s WORTHY of our praise!

God’s acts are so **awe-inspiring** and His greatness so truly **limitless** that not one of us can even **begin** to plumb its depths. **Ps. 145:3** says, “**Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom.**” The word “**fathom**” comes from the ancient word “**fadym**” meaning a “**thread**” used to measure the **distance** between two things. Our word “**fathom**” then came to mean “**to measure something, such as the depth of water under a ship to see if it can safely pass over**”. (You may recall that’s how Samuel Clemens chose his pseudonym, “**Mark Twain**”.) And **SO** comes the question God’s people need to ask themselves every day: “**Do we TRULY trust that our Almighty God is powerful enough to sufficiently meet ALL our needs?**”

You see, over the **years**, even God’s people can get a little too **trapped** by their **perceived LIMITATIONS** in life—our supposedly limited amount of **time, money, skills, patience**, and other things that hinder the work of God’s kingdom from ever getting **started**—let alone **completed**—in God’s church! But God **Himself HAS** no such limits! God could **NEVER** exhaust all the resources He wants

to make **available to us** to help meet our **own** countless needs, **as well as** to **ACCOMPLISH** the work of His kingdom...if we just **ASK** Him! So let me explain by **example**.

Most of us living around here probably have been to **Lake Tahoe**. **Originally**, there was a folk legend that the **bottom** of Lake Tahoe "*has never been found*"...which is tempting to believe when when you **see** that beautiful blue lake. After **all**, it's the **eighth deepest lake** in the **world**! But on July 4, 1875, two men **did** discover the deepest point in the lake bottom to be **1,645 feet** (or about **275 "fathoms."**) Many years later, **sonar soundings** by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration **confirmed** that depth. Lake Tahoe is **so large** that...if the lake were **tipped over**, its contents would cover California in **14.5 inches of water**, and could provide every person in the United States with **50 gallons** of water per day for **5 years**! And yet, as someone born and raised in **Michigan**, I can tell you Lake Tahoe is a **POND** compared to **Lake Superior (120 times** as large)...as well as the world's **largest** lake, the **Caspian Sea (576 times** as large). My **POINT** is: your use of water could never **personally** exhaust the limits of Lake Tahoe. In the same way, **WHATEVER** your need might **BE**, you can't exhaust our great, **Almighty God's** storehouses. And so, St. Paul writes in Philippians 4:19, "*...My God will meet ALL your NEEDS according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*" Now **THERE**, my fellow redeemed, is a promise we can claim and give **THANKS** for **DAILY**, without having to wait for some **special HOLIDAY**!

In ancient Greece it was customary for peddlers to walk the streets with their wares, crying out, "**Ti sou leípei?**" ("*What do you lack?*"). Coming out of their houses, people wanted to know what the peddler was **selling**...perhaps something a person might **lack** or **need**...or simply something they **desired**. Well, St. Paul assures us in **Philippians 4:19** that..."*God will supply EVERY need of yours from His glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.*" So **KNOW WELL** that whatever you truly **LACK**, our Almighty God has **EXACTLY** what you truly **NEED**!

King David **ALSO** says in Ps 145:13 that **GOD IS GRACIOUS!**

"*The Lord always keeps His promises; He is GRACIOUS in all He does.*" To know that God is **ALL-POWERFUL** is both **COMFORTING** and **EMPOWERING**, but to know that God also is **GRACIOUS** kicks up our praises to **next level**, because whoever recognizes that God is **gracious**, understands God more **completely** than any person who merely realizes that God is **POWERFUL** or **even ALL-powerful**. God's **TRUE** glory shines brightest in the **GRACE** He freely showers on us **prodigals** who don't deserve even one **sprinkle** of it.

You've may have heard me tell this story **before**, but during a British conference on "Comparative Religions", theological experts were debating **WHAT**, if **ANY**, belief was totally unique to **CHRISTIANITY**, compared to **other** religions. They began eliminating possibilities: The **Incarnation**? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. **Resurrection**? Again, other religions had accounts of returning from the dead. The debate went on for some time until **C. S. Lewis** wandered into the room and asked, "**What's the RUMPUS all about?**" and heard that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's **unique contribution** among all the **other** world religions. Lewis responded, "*Oh, that's easy. It's GRACE.*" After some discussion, the others all had to **AGREE!**

The notion of God's love coming to us **free of charge** seems to go against every instinct of **self-centered, works-oriented** humanity. The Buddhist **eight-fold path**, the Hindu doctrine of **Karma**, the Muslim code of **Sharia law**, and even the Jewish **Covenant** regulations **each** offer a way to **EARN** approval. But **ONLY CHRISTIANITY** dares to make the hand of God's love **UNCONDITIONAL**. **GRACE** tells us that everything is all **RIGHT** in spite of so much in us being so **WRONG**! God's grace sets us **free** from trying to foolishly **earn** God's forgiveness when He already earned it **FOR** us in the work of **Christ**. "**Grace**" has been defined as "*God giving us what we don't deserve*" and His "**Mercy**" as "*not giving us what we DO deserve.*" In an **earlier** psalm, we're reminded of God's grace **AND** mercy toward us where it says, "*The Lord does not treat us as our sins DESERVE or repay us according to our iniquities.*"

This **Thanksgiving**, we're naturally thankful for what God has **given** us, such as a job, home, friends, family, our possessions, our health, etc. But how often are we **GRATEFUL** or even **MINDFUL** for what He has **NOT** given us? Like He has **NOT** given us the consequences and punishment that our sins **deserve!** What a **GOD** we have Who opens up his **hands** to absolutely **ANYONE** who won't foolishly push those hands away!

The story is told of an ancient **kingdom** whose king had just **died**, and whose ambassadors were sent to choose a **successor**. They had to make a **choice** between **TWO TWIN INFANTS**. Well, they finally found the little fellows, **side-by-side, fast asleep**. Looking at them ever so **carefully**, they agreed that it seemed an **impossibly difficult to DECIDE!** **That is**, until they noticed a curious little **DIFFERENCE** between them. As they **lay** there, **ONE** infant had his tiny fists **CLOSED TIGHT**, but the **OTHER** slept with his little hands **WIDE OPEN**. **Instantly**, they made their selection of the **LATTER CHILD**, and sure **ENOUGH**, the story concludes with the record that as he grew up in his "high station", this **wise** and **benevolent monarch** came to be known as "**THE KING WITH THE OPEN HANDS.**"

This is the great truth about **OUR** God. We don't have a **tight-fisted tyrant** of a deity, but a King of the Universe with **EVER-OPEN HANDS**, because our God is **the GREATEST of ALL GIVERS**...even to the point of giving His **ONLY SON**, Whose **NAILED-SCARRED HANDS** bought us the gift of life and salvation and opened the doors of **heaven** for us! And so, we praise and give thanks to God on this special day of Thanksgiving because of His great **grace, love, and MERCY**, and because God's **HAND** has touched each of us here **PERSONALLY**...from the day of our **BAPTISM** by adopting us into His **Forever Family** and bringing us into a close-knit spiritual family that will continue **all the way into eternity!**

But we don't have to wait until **heaven** to experience the closeness and nearness of **God's presence**.

David says here in Ps. 145:18, "*The Lord is **NEAR** to all who call upon Him in truth.*" Centuries before, Moses made the **same point** when he rhetorically asked the Children of Israel in **Deut. 4:7**, "*For what great nation is there that has a God so **NEAR** to it as is the Lord our God, whenever we **CALL** on Him?"*

Our omnipresent God is close by to **each** of His redeemed children and attentive to our special **needs**, promising to hear our **prayers** and save our **souls**. These are great and powerful **promises** while we still walk this earth! So St. Paul picks **up** on that in Philippians 4:5-7 and tells us how to **respond**, "*Let your **gentleness** be evident to all. **The Lord is NEAR**. So do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, **WITH THANKSGIVING**, present your requests to God. And the **peace** of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" What a great and comforting **promise** in a world today filled with uncertainty, chaos, and even **WAR** as a **different** psalmist in **Ps. 46:1 ALSO** assures us that our God will always stand by us as our "*Refuge and Strength, and **EVER-PRESENT HELP** in time of trouble.*"

Conclusion

We **began** by saying that of 150 psalms, this is the only one that has the title "*A psalm of praise.*" This also is the **LAST** psalm **written** by **King David**...at least that we **KNOW** of. Perhaps he reserved this title for his last psalm to emphasize that **ALL** of his words should end "**in praise to God**". This is reinforced by **the LAST VERSE** of his **LAST PSALM** that ends with, "*My mouth will speak in **praise of the Lord**. Let every creature **PRAISE** His holy Name for ever and ever.*"

If you were to draw a picture showing what **YOU** are **thankful for** this Thanksgiving, would you draw an **OPEN HAND**, like little Henry? If not, what **WOULD** you draw?

More importantly, this Thanksgiving, remember **ABOVE ALL** that God is not only to be **THANKED** for

what He **DOES**, but also to be **PRAISED** for Who and all that **He IS...an OMNIPOTENT, OMNIPRESENT**, but most of all, a **GRACIOUS** God Who instead of slapping us in His **wrath** with the **BACK** of His **hand**...gently opens up the **PALM** of His **HAND** to pour out His mercy, love, and forgiveness to us who humbly admit we **NEED** a hand!

So as we busily challenge our brains to think of all the different ways to **THANK** God for His undeserved blessings in our lives, let's also take a page from King David's **Psalm 145** and not forget to also raise our **own** open hands to God in **PURE PRAISE** for **BEING** that "**open-handed King of the Universe**", Who's worthy of **worship** and **honor** simply for Who He **IS** and not **ONLY** for what He has **DONE!**

In that Savior's **Name**, Amen.