

This week's worship began with the creativity of our current moderator Martha Kelleher, who chose the readings and hymns, and then collaborated with our current "music organizer" Ryan Overbeek. The theme of harvest and fall is of course very timely; hope you liked Charlie Brown's Pumpkin Waltz! (It seems pumpkins are everywhere: in drinks, in pancakes, rolling them down streets...). My calling, though, is to ponder how our Creator God is part of all this!

The songwriter in Psalm 8 said a few times, "How majestic is thy name in all the earth! ... when I look at the heavens, the moon and the stars!" And naturally we can add, "When we look at the fall foliage, and the fruits of the gardens, we say how awesome, how majestic is the Creator of this world! To seek and find God, people of every time and place have often started with the amazing sights and sounds of *nature*; how complex, how inexplicable, how wondrous is the natural world.

But then we need to move on to our place in the creation. The psalm writer says that we are made just "a little lower than angels," echoing Genesis that we are made "in God's image." The reading from Paul asks us to "put on love, which binds everything together in harmony." So this harvest time, we also need to harvest Love, love as harmonious "fellowship" or community. We admit that we are not always in great harmony with one another, that we fight and war with each other. Yet Paul insists that followers of Christ must "Put on love." He says: "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, lowliness, patience and forgiveness!"

Before we feel badly about how far we fall short, let me look at two key points from Paul. At the end of the reading, we hear Paul telling us to "sing spiritual songs with thankfulness." We

come to a place of worship to feel the energy and goodwill of others singing along with us! Another way to look at this is that Worship is our way of putting God *first* in our lives... “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God” said Jesus, (There’s a nice camp song with that title.) Conversely, it follows that it is often destructive to put ourselves first; too much of that can become self-centeredness, self-absorption, even clinical narcissism. It is also dangerous to put *things* first; the biblical definition of that is “idolatry,” worshipping silver or gold as if they were gods, like some of us do if we put first our material belongs and savings. True and healthy worship is putting God first, having “no other gods before me,” and that includes our family members and friends, who cannot be like God to us, since humans will always disappoint and fall short of our hopes and expectations.

The second key point, from our readings this morning, is to make a practice of recognizing and respecting our differing God-given gifts. Paul’s letter to the Romans speaks of many different gifts that his church members had: prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, contributing, acts of mercy, etc. We could add many more; as you look around the room, and think of your family and friends and acquaintances.... surely you can come up with good gifts or skills in every person! We function well as a community if all are valued: Again, look around: Some have preaching skills, some have teaching skills, some have gifts of greeting and hospitality. Some have good skills with listening (we all could do better in this area!). Some have visions and dreams; others are better at setting and implementing goals. Some have accounting skills, some have organizational skills (oops, not me... and that is an important point in church community, that no pastor or minister has all the skills needed in church life). Some have skills

with food and food pantries, others with clothing and thrift shop management. Some have gifts with children, others have gifts with music. We see so many gifts right here as we look around.

Sure, there are always things that also annoy us about other people, shortcomings and failings, but that's where the gospel's admonition of forgiveness is crucial. All of us need to include forgiving, "forbearing one another" as part of the broad commandment to love. Humor is also a loving way to deal with mistakes and shortcomings. Laughter does heal! Humor is a form of humility and grace, to deal lovingly with mistakes and shortcomings, and humor is a natural prelude to Joy, something Jesus promised!

The beauty of the fall season is so obvious; the beauty of God's creation so evident. Can we harvest not only food from gardens, but also fruits of the spirit, fruits of loving and harmonious community? It can start with continual thanksgiving, always having a word of thanks in our hearts, thanks to God our Creator as a top priority, counting every blessing, even in tough times. And secondly, this thanksgiving can be respect and thanks for the unique gifts of each of our brothers and sisters and neighbors, to encourage such gifts, while forgiving any annoying habits or shortcomings of course!

As Paul says: if possible, so long as it depends on you or me, let's live in peace, in the harmony and beauty of God's amazing creation! Amen.