

^p *Straight from the "Hart"*

November 19, 2023 - Thanksgiving Sunday

Finding Your Place Among God's People



Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are here and participating in worship through this service script.

Litany of Gratitude

(R: Reader, C: Congregation)

R: Generous God, for the abundance of your blessings to us day by day and year by year,

C: We give you our thanks.

R: For the simple pleasures of life: for garden harvests, coffee conversation, for health and strength to appreciate the wonder of life, for needs met and desires fulfilled,

C: We give you our thanks.

R: For foods to nourish body and spirit, for homes which supply shelter and offer hospitality,

C: We give you our thanks.

R: With hearts that forgive as freely as you have forgiven, with enthusiasm of spirit for the gift of life, with music which declares your everlasting goodness, with prayers for mutual understanding and peace,

C: We worship you with joy.

R: With God-given talents, with words which honor you. with time volunteered and dedicated to service in church and community, committed to extending the love of Jesus Christ,

C: We worship you with joy.

R: With gifts of resources which reach beyond ourselves, with deeds done in service of family, friends, neighbor and stranger, distant and nearby, and with holy days set apart to celebrate your goodness and grace,

C: We worship you, God, with grateful hearts and joyful spirits. Alleluia. Amen.

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Opening Prayer

Almighty God, we joyfully celebrate our unlimited trust in your faithful promises. As we gladly lay these gifts on your altar, we are also placing ourselves in your hands. Enable ministries that free us from hindrances and will refresh our hearts in your love. We pray this with praise and thanksgiving through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Call to Worship

Come with shouts of joy and songs of praise and the sounds of hope and love! Enter God's house with thanks-giving and full of praise, for God is our God, our Creator, and he is good. And we are his people, led by his never-ending love. Enter these moments of thanks - giving to our God.

(ad. from a portion of) "Call to Worship for Thanksgiving: Inspired by Psalm 100..."; by Richard Bott, and posted on SharingLiturgy.at/riturgy.richardbott.com



Music

One of the things we are thankful to God for is his care.

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Words: Joachim Neander, 1680 (vv 1,3,5) trans. by Catherine Winkworth, 1863
(v 2) trans. by S Paul Shilling, 1986; (v4) trans. by Rupert E Davies, 1983
trans. of vv 2,4 © 1989 UM Publishing House

Music: Erneuereten Gesangbuch; 1665 harm. by William Sterndale Bennett, 1864

1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation.
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, now to his temple draw near;
join me in glad adoration!
2. Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigning
bears thee on eagle's wings, e'er in his keeping maintaining.
God's care enfolds all, whose true good he upholds.
Hast thou not known his sustaining?
3. Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;
surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee.
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
who with his love doth befriend thee.
4. Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,
fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee.

Then to thy need God as a mother doth speed,
spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

5. Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the amen sound from his people again;
gladly forever adore him.

Theme

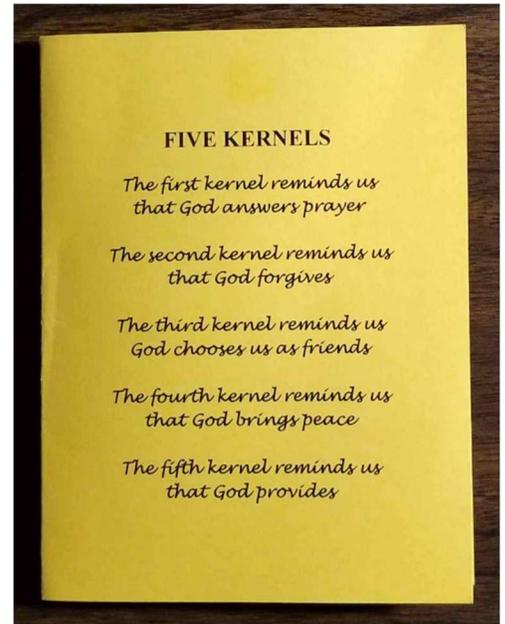
Hopefully when you came in you got a little handout called "5 kernels" on the top. You don't need to look at it now, but this is what I am going to talk about at this point.

Here is a version of the short story:

The first winter the Pilgrims spent in their new home, food was very scarce. Some days there was only enough for 5 kernels of corn apiece. How did they survive during these hard times? Did they give in to bitterness and despair? No. The Pilgrims chose to trust in the Lord – regardless of their circumstances. They chose to thank him for what they were given, no matter the size. The 5 kernels of corn were a blessing. From then on, every Thanksgiving the Pilgrims put 5 kernels of corn aside to remind them of their blessings.

Some historians now doubt the accuracy of the details of that story but believe it to be a parable that developed later to honor those early settlers and what was truly a horrific struggle to survive in those first few years. Someone described their family tradition (that he suspects they picked up when they lived in New England) this way: A bountiful feast filled the center of the table that was laid out with the finest china. It looked like a Norman Rockwell painting. But when they sat at the table, there would be only 5 kernels of corn on their plate. And then some version of the story I just told was told, and it was a reminder that we are to be thankful whether in plenty or in want; and then they went around the table and each named 5 things that they were thankful for.

Your Thanksgiving handout briefly describes this with a little bit more history in it, and inside you have not 5 kernels of corn, but what do you call those things? -- [Congregation: "Candy corn"]. Candy corn. By the way, there are 5 days between



now and Thursday – I will suggest, if you haven't already eaten them 😊, that you take one out each day and name something you are thankful for and then eat it. You can do what you want, but that is my suggestion.

The five kernels of thanksgiving that you see on the booklet's cover, were taken from the Psalm that is scheduled (if you know what the lectionary is) from the lectionary -- for today's Psalm reading. I looked to see if I could find in the Psalm five things that we are thankful for, and then I arranged the verses topically, because the author kind of went in circles on some of them, and that is what we are going to hear now -- the topics were inserted into the reading (*in bold italics*) while we hear the Psalm itself.

Bible Reading 1

God answers prayer To you, God, silence [the submissive wonder of reverence] is praise; and vows {to praise God for his answers to prayer} shall be fulfilled. You who listen to prayer, to you all living creatures come. It is [right] that you answer us with awesome and wondrous deeds. God of our salvation, you in whom all put their trust and hope to the ends of the earth and the distant seas.

God forgives When deeds of wickedness and guilt overwhelm me, you forgive our transgressions and atone for our crimes.

God chooses us as friends Blessed are those you choose and bring near, so that they can dwell in your courtyards! We will be filled with the goodness of your house, the Holy Place of your temple. They who dwell at the ends of the earth stand in awe of your signs [the evidence of your presence]. The places where the sun rises and sets you cause to sing for joy.

God brings peace By your strength you set up the mountains. You are clothed with power. You still the roaring of the seas, their crashing waves, and the turmoil of the peoples.

God provides You care for the earth and water it, you enrich it greatly... you provide their grain and prepare the ground. Soaking its furrows and settling its soil, you soften it with showers and bless its growth. You crown the year with your bounty... the meadows are clothed with flocks and the valleys blanketed with grain, so they shout for joy and break into song.

Psalm 65: 1-2, 5; 3; 4,8; 6-7; from 9-13 (CJB, NASB, AMP)

Music The Psalmist begins and ends by calling us to thankful praise and singing for his answered prayers and his abundant provision, as does this next hymn...

All Creatures of Our God and King

Words: Francis of Assisi, ca. 1225; trans. by William H. Draper, 1925, adapt. 1987

Music: Geistliche Kirchengesane, 1623; harm. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906

1. All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing,
O praise ye! Alleluia!

O brother sun with golden beam, O sister moon with silver gleam!
O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

4. Dear mother earth, who day by day unfoldest blessings on our way,
Alleluia! Alleluia!

The flowers and fruits that in thee grow, let them God's glory also show!
O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

5. All ye who are of tender heart, forgiving others, take your part,
O praise ye! Alleluia!

Ye who long pain and sorrow bear, praise God and on him cast your care!
O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

7. Let all things their Creator bless, and worship him in humbleness,
O praise ye! Alleluia!

Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One!
O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

God Moments (These testimonies were not transcribed)

Music Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing...

Bless His Holy Name

Words and Music: Andrae Crouch

© 1973 Bud John Songs

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

He has done great things, he has done great things, he has done great things,
bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Prayers

Lord, we bless you, we praise you, we are grateful to you because you keep our spirits and our bodies safe. We heard from the congregation, from your people, how in an instant things can change, and you protect us; and how over the long term of a life you continue to work and move and help, and in every kind of time frame in-between – the beauty that you provide for us each day, we are so thankful. We find strength in you, you provide every good thing. For you are our Lord, and

we are your people. And we rejoice in your people because they inspire us, they encourage us to remain faithful on our spiritual journey, and for this we are grateful to each other. But our ultimate security and life is in your hands. We rejoice with glad hearts and voices because you never abandon us. You hold us through every challenge and setback. No matter what comes our way - as we keep our eyes on you and seek your voice in the silence. You teach us day and night and with every choice we make. Because you are with us, we cannot be shaken. You bless us and promise to reward us with a beautiful and eternal future.

Petitions Therefore, with this confidence, we lift our praises and requests to you. We pray for Mr. Bransner with cardiac problems, and Cheri's friend, * Kathy Novak requests for the family and friends of Renee Jones who died two days ago while snorkeling on vacation in Madagascar. She was the daughter-in-law of Mary Jones, who some of you may know, and Renee's husband is Mark, they are good friends of Kathy. * Pat Schleh requests for Israel and all the innocent victims. We continue to pray for * for Jan Martin – (leukemia) -- she says thank you for the prayers they are working, and to keep them up. Yesterday was her best feeling day since she started. * Nile Remsing asked last week for a friend to be free from addiction * the Gordoniers' friend Al Davis adjusts to life without one of his legs, * For Ava Lewis and her mother, who is in hospice, * for Joyce Vahala, now down south in a home, and hopefully in healing slowly but surely, but it is a difficult situation, * for Sally's friend Wes, last I heard was doing well with his treatments, * we already mentioned Israel, but we pray for peace in the world and in our lives, wherever there is violence or turmoil, we pray for your peace to come, just as the Psalmist promised. * and finally for those we have not named out loud but are still on our hearts and minds, we pause just briefly to lift them up to you as well. (Pause)

Quilts And today we also pray for and dedicate two quilts for Scarlett and Skylar, and their parents too.

Scarlett is a 3-year-old who has cancer, and her 6-year-old sister Skylar, who, if it becomes necessary, will be donating



bone marrow...so we dedicate these two quilts for these two children and their family. Lord ask that you shower this family with your blessings and fill them with your Spirit. We ask that as they see these quilts, tangible tokens of the care and prayers of this church; that their faith is renewed in your love and in their future.

And as they wrap them around them, may they feel the warmth of your comfort. Give strength when they feel weak and lift their attitudes when their spirits falter. Give them a sense of calm.

Let them look forward in anticipation to all that you have planned for their lives. Let each new day bring an abundance of possibilities. We bless these quilts in the name of the One who walks with us in all of our joys and in all of our sorrows.

(Pause) And now, Lord, restore all of us with what we need, raise us up, free us, and strengthen us to faithfully serve you and live as you taught us to pray: **Lord's Prayer.**

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

On the heels of Jesus teaching that we are to be good stewards of what he has given us (Matthew 25:14ff), he tells us what kind of people we are. --- Just as God demonstrates his love for us by his actions in Christ (Romans 5:8) our loving actions should be understood as a natural reflection of our heart. So natural that we don't even recognize that we are doing anything special as we practice our faith – it is just a part of who we are, and Jesus demonstrates through a parable.



When the Son of Man comes in his glory...All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you [like this and do these things for you]?' The King replied, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Then he will say to those on the left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal flame prepared for the devil and his angels.

[And then the conversation is repeated almost verbatim to those who did NOT do those same things for the least of these, and therefore NOT for Christ. Like the "sheep", the "goats" also failed to recognize the connection.

Then Jesus concludes] Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

Key Verses from Matthew 25:31-46 (NIV) [Portions summarized]

Music And now a song that begins as a call to come and pray our thanks for God's provision of a literal harvest, then switching to a prayer that as we are sorted out in the end, that we will be found to be wholesome grain (the sheep of the parable we just heard) and not the tares, the weeds, (the goats of the parable).

Come, Ye Thankful People, Come

Words: Henry Alford, 1844 Music: George J. Elvey, 1858

1. Come, ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home;
all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin.
God our Maker doth provide for our wants to be supplied;
come to God's own temple, come, raise the song of harvest home.
2. All the world is God's own field, fruit as praise to God we yield;
wheat and tares together sown are to joy or sorrow grown;
first the blade and then the ear, then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be.
3. For the Lord our God shall come, and shall take the harvest home;
from the field shall in that day all offenses purge away,
giving angels charge at last in the fire the tares to cast;
but the fruitful ears to store in the garner evermore.

Intro to and Bible Reading 3

James gives another example of how our love is to flow naturally and then gives us the theological basis for why we relate to others fairly and faithfully -- regardless of how they are publicly perceived. But first, we quote Paul who gives us the topic's "heading".

There is no favoritism with God. Romans 2:11 (HCSB), My dear friends, don't let public opinion influence how you live out your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. If someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in old, dirty clothes; and you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you ignore or say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor." Doesn't this show that you think some people are more important than others and show that your judgments can't be trusted and are guided by evil motives?... One law rules over all other laws. You are doing right and well when you complete the Royal Rule of the Scriptures: "Love others as you love yourself." But if you are playing up to these so-called important people, treating them as more important than another, you are sinning. You are guilty of breaking God's Rule and stand convicted by it. James 2:1-4,8-9 (MSG, NLT, ERV)

Sermon Finding Our Place Among Humanity

As he was reading the passage, I couldn't help think of one paraphrase in which the poor person was told to "sit in the back row". But these days, those are sometimes considered the best seats, so can't really use that translation. 😊

A pastor offers another thanksgiving tradition that comes from his roots in the West Virginia hills. An empty chair stands ready to be filled or to be gazed upon, and an extra plate and extra portions in case an unexpected visitor shows up – but even more, as a reminder that no matter how many were present, there is always room for one more. The chair and plate speaks to our spirits that as Christians, as nations, as a human race, no matter how quote unquote lovely or unlovely -- or having or not having, we are ALL family.

When we say we love but don't act in loving ways – or when we act in loving ways but not out of love, it is like trying to drive a car that is terribly out of alignment. You may keep it on the road, but after a while your knuckles get white, and the muscles in your arms get sore trying to always adjust and fight against what the car is trying to do differently. We need to realign the car. We need to realign our life with the love of Christ -- and while there are still potholes and temptations, when the basic mechanism underneath is true, when the heart is right, then our life will stay on the right road much more naturally and effortlessly.

This is why we have talked about finding our place among God's people and finding our place before

Let Love Flow Naturally

God himself, before we take our lives out on the road and search for our place among greater humanity. Who are we and how do we fit in to God's world as he wants us to fit in? Our texts made it clear that loving actions are a big part of it, and we don't want to have to force it, we want it to flow naturally so that at any given point in time we will be moving down the center of the road, the center of God's will. It is important that we can do it at any time because, well ---

I took a grammar class in college. Might not be able to tell (☺). The first day we received a handout. It had a line drawing of a profile of a person's face from the neck up, and it had lines coming out from the various parts labeled all the various places that the different sounds of the English language are formed. She said, "Learn this." and then told us to read some pages of the textbook. The next time we met two days later, she handed out the same paper again, except this time the lines were blank and we were supposed to fill in the lines. And then there were additional questions after that. It took us a minute to dawn on us that we were getting a pop quiz. The third time we met, two days later, she began with a stern lecture for only one person had passed this impromptu test. Some cried foul – "You didn't say when we had to learn it by - we would have been prepared and done well if we had only known the deadline."

Jesus says the end will come upon us suddenly like a thief, or in our context -- like a pop quiz. We want to be tested on our Sunday best behaviors that we have crammed for the night before. Therefore, we want warnings and timetables of when the night before is -- so we know when we need to be cramming to be prepared for that final exam, so we have all the magical words and creeds and deeds and claims and connections to pass entrance.

But instead, we are tested on the day in and day out events and words of life that we just do and say because they flow out of our hearts without us even thinking about it. In Jesus' parable, those who stood before God didn't even realize the good they were doing, or failing to do, whichever flowed out of who they truly were.

So, what is in our hearts? What are our motivations? Are our good deeds a task, a duty, a check off list to be

What is in our heart?

received because we've been told it is part of the final exam? Or is it something that (at least eventually) becomes a joy and second nature to us because it is just who we are and we don't even think about it? Something happens and we just

respond. The hoped-for response is one of compassion, especially for those in need, according to these texts that we've read today.. What are the characteristics of compassion – of true compassion?

Compassion Craves Understanding.
Nancy Eastridge wrote, I laughed when I

Compassion Craves Understanding

saw the parrot making a great fuss about getting from its perch to the ground of its cage. It seemed to be struggling so hard and so much in vain. "Funny bird", I said, "Come on! Why don't you just fly down to the ground?" Then the owner told me that its wings were clipped so it wouldn't fly away. I watched the parrot struggle--swinging from one foot, turning itself upside down, hanging on with its beak, and finally falling and lying dazed on the floor of the cage. And now there was no laughter in me, she wrote, for the parrot had become a symbol. It was like all those people who appear to be free in our world, but who have had their wings clipped--by poverty, by lack of education, by discrimination, by insensitive persons [and the list could go on and on]. And we tend to stand on the sidelines and say, "Those strange people! Why don't they just – fly? act like the rest of us? As we say this, we show that we are unaware of the pain and despair and histories of those who, like the parrot, *appear* to be free and fine and able to fly - but can't.

John Wesley put it this way, "Is it not strange, that this important truth [of loving the least] should be so little understood, or, at least, should so little influence the practice of them that fear God?" He went on to say, "One part of the world does not know what the other suffers... One person said 'I am a very compassionate person. But to tell you the truth, I do not know anybody in the world that is in want.' (I've heard politicians make these kinds of speeches when they don't want to support something, even just the last couple years). Wesley concluded, how did this come to pass? (I assume the same way the modern politicians do), Wesley says, he took care to keep out of their way, and if he fell upon any of them unawares, "he passed over on the other side." Compassion craves understanding.

Compassion also considers how others feel. Faith Fowler, who was or is (I'm not sure which) a Social Ministries Director in the Detroit area, explained her

**Compassion considers
how others feel**

thoughts on how to do this well. People have not only physical and economic needs, but also emotional and spiritual needs. Sometimes, when people help with the first (the physical and economic needs) they do it in a way that damages the second (the spiritual and emotional needs). We help, but it is always on our terms,

our control, and the way we want to do it and they have no input -- not anything. This is how she likened it -- to a newborn baby that is totally dependent. We stick a bottle in their mouths, and we feed them. And they are grateful because that is the only way they can eat. But try doing that to an adult. Puts them in a highchair and stick a bottle in their mouth and say "Here." and expect them to be grateful. With no input, who would that make you feel? Sometimes, this is how some people make recipients feel when they are forced by life to humbly receive help – by the nature of how they are helped. We need to consider how people feel as they ask for and receive help.

Compassion also asks what people truly need. To use an extreme fictional example, it'd be like sending light summer clothes to the northernmost parts of Canada, and snowblowers to Liberia. Both areas respond, "Huh, why?" And the givers think "We gave them a whole lot -- and all we got in response is confusion and anger. We don't get it!" Not only did the givers not give helpfully, they also demonstrated they didn't really care for the recipients because they did not pay attention to what was really needed. What they primarily cared about was how they were perceived as great givers and were upset that the receivers didn't see it that way.

Compassion asks what people truly need

It is this errant attitude that leads to givers giving thoughtlessly. Such as at one Christmas banquet where the needy were invited to come and be showered with gifts -- and a *homeless* person loudly protested when they opened their gift to find a wind chime for the front porch – for a homeless person. How do you know what is really needed? You ask... because it isn't just about what we think they need, it is about what they think they need as well -- and often, they have a better handle on what is truly needed.

A mission team traveled to improve a rundown neighborhood. They spent 1,000 dollars on T-Shirts so they could all look alike while they did it. They rented a big trailer and brought in mowers and trimmers and all kinds of equipment and pulled into the community and spent a week mowing and trimming and buffing and shining all the vacant lots of the neighborhood. THEN they went to the Community leaders and said, "Isn't this great?" And the leaders said "No." And they couldn't figure out why. And so the leaders explained it to them: "All that money and time and effort – and in two weeks everything will simply grow back to what it was before. Meanwhile, around the corner there is an entry door to the community helping center that leaks like a sieve and winter was coming and the bitter winds would

howl through those doors making everything and everyone cold inside. Half the money, half the effort, half the resources, and you could have done something that could have been lasting and helpful. But you never asked.”

Think about the life of the other. Put your feet in their shoes, if they have any. Allow them to be a part of the process so we don't make well-intentioned but unhelpful errors leading to frustration and disappointment on both sides. So we don't force feed pork to orthodox Jews and we don't give sugary desserts to diabetics, and -- you get the idea?

Compassion also offers dignity and respect. It is easy to forget. One young man

Compassion offers dignity / respect

came into a help center with one of those thermal pizza delivery containers. He asked to fill it with hot water. They were happy to do that. They eventually found out he couldn't afford the utility to heat water and so he brought it home to take a shower with it. In the meantime, the Center's Director was getting unmarked, unnamed envelopes slid under her office door with \$3 inside. She finally put the timing together and realized that he was paying for the hot water he was taking.

She told him, “You don't have to do this – we don't need the money”. His answer to her was, “It's not about you.” He needed his dignity, to pay for what he was getting. Giving respect and dignity to people is the most important thing said, "The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your own riches, but to reveal to the other person the riches in them as well." - the riches they have in their own lives.

So in that same banquet where the person got the front porch chime, and there were a lot of other things going wrong in that banquet as well – so they decided to revamp the whole process. Instead of doing the banquet where the rich gave to the poor – some getting a whole lot and some getting very little – and then they would go back to their community and the person next door got an x-box and a bike and other things, and we got a coloring book. It was causing all kinds of problems in the community. So what they did instead was that they had the rich donate to a central store, and then they priced the gifts in a way that the poor could afford them, and then when it was ready the poor would go through the store and find what really worked for them in their own family according to their own tastes and interests and needs. And though the prices were low, they were paying for it. Then the store helped them wrap them and they took the gifts home and were able to open them in their own homes and they could say to each other “I bought this

for you.” What dynamic of dignity does that create for a family as opposed to coming and getting stuff from strangers – stuff that you may not even want?

One more story. Dan West was a relief worker during the Spanish Civil War and was handing out cups of powdered milk to a long lines of hungry children on both sides of the conflict. The milk always ran out before the line did. As a farmer, West thought outside the box – how can we make this work better so they can feed fresh nourishing milk to their children themselves, instead of depending upon the *possibility* of powdered milk coming from across the seas? He talks with some of his farming friends back in Indiana and they decided to begin work flowing out of the phrase “not a cup but a cow”. Families received them and were trained how to care for them and made a commitment that the first female offspring would be passed on to another family in need, and they would train that family to care for it and they would make the same commitment to pass on the first female born with training to yet another family. So it was kind of a micro-business thing that was going on. Goats and cows and chickens and sheep and rabbits and camels and water buffalo and llamas and guinea pigs have circled the world through what is now known as Heifer Project International, which has now helped millions of people throughout the world to improve their quality of life and move toward greater self-reliance.

The things we do for each other -- and beyond -- may not seem earth-shattering, but it does make a difference. Every encouragement letter, every phone call, every visit, every giving a ride, every formal/official task done through the church or other organizations, or informal/personal tasks – done for our neighbors or strangers -- whatever opportunity that comes our way as we walk through the week -- we do it, not because we need to do good things to pass the final pop exam, or to be *seen* doing good things by our peers, but we do it naturally because of who we are [or who we are becoming] in Christ. Because it is in the nature of Christ’s people to be concerned for others and to find our particular place to make a difference in God’s world. That is what we are about.

Prayer Let’s pray. Father, we thank you for your love and care shown in the actions of Jesus Christ. We thank you for your people who have shown love and cared for us enough to make a difference by building us up in faith and life. Guide and direct us to how we can do the same for each other and for those we do not even know – yet. Forgive us when we fail. Continue drawing us and growing us together under your grace. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Music Charles Wesley wrote that the appealing, magnetic draw of God's love inspires us to love and help others because it is who we become when we are recipients of his grace.

Jesus, United by Thy Grace

Words: Charles Wesley, 1742 Music: John B. Dykes, 1866

1. Jesus, united by thy grace and each to each endeared,
with confidence we seek thy face and know our prayer is heard.
2. Help us to help each other, Lord, each other's cross to bear;
let all their friendly aid afford, and feel each other's care.
4. Touched by the lodestone of thy love, let all our hearts agree,
and ever toward each other move, and ever move toward thee.

Blessing: Now send us from this place -- but never from your presence -- or from each other in spirit, as we continue our journey of faithful discipleship, finding our place in faith among your people, before you, and in your world. Amen.