

Rev. Lisa Schrott  
November 5, 2023  
Psalm 107:1-9; 33-37  
*Future Saints*

Our scripture reading this morning is from Psalm 107: 1-9 and continuing with verses 33-37.

O give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good,  
for God's steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,  
those the Lord redeemed from trouble  
and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.

Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to an inhabited town;  
hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and the Lord delivered them from their distress;

The Lord led them by a straight way,  
until they reached an inhabited town.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,  
for the wonderful works to humankind.

For the Lord satisfies the thirsty,  
and the hungry the Lord fills with good things ...

The Lord turns rivers into a desert,  
springs of water into thirsty ground,  
a fruitful land into a salty waste,  
because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.

The Lord turns a desert into pools of water,  
a parched land into springs of water.

And there the Lord lets the hungry live,  
and they establish a town to live in;

they sow fields and plant vineyards  
and get a fruitful yield. **This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God**

Our psalm this morning, Psalm 107 is titled in my Bible "Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Many Troubles." The author describes four different situations of distress in this psalm: we heard about the danger of thirst and starvation in the desert in verses 4-5 that I read. Later verses describe prisoners shackled in irons sitting in darkness and in gloom; those who were ill – so sick they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death; and finally some who are caught in storms on the sea, storms so severe their courage melted away in

their calamity; they reeled and staggered like drunkards and were at their wits' end. And yet throughout the psalm there is thanksgiving – gratitude for all God has done to save them from these calamities. The psalm opens, “O give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good, for God’s steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those the Lord redeemed from trouble.”

O give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good, for God’s steadfast love endures forever. The story told in this psalm is one of redemption – a shift in the mindset of the people. Yes, these terrible events have happened. And yes God has walked with us through these troubles. God had given us a new chance at life – providing for our food and water, freeing us from prison, healing us and saving us from the storms of life. The people are grateful for all that the Lord has done in the past and the present and promises to do in the future.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann describes the psalms as describing the people moving from “an ordered, reliable life to an existence that somehow has run amok. The Psalms give expression to that new reality of disorientation, when everything on heaven and earth seems skewed.”<sup>1</sup> In a few psalms, we are left “in the pit” to lament. However, in many psalms, like in our psalm this morning, we see a move from disorientation to a new orientation, to the gift of new life. “Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and the Lord delivered them from their distress. The Lord led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town.”

Brueggemann notes that the “...new orientation is not just a return to the old stable orientation, for there is no going back. The psalmists know we can never go home again. ...Rather, the speaker and the community of faith are often surprised by grace, when there emerges in present life a new possibility that is inexplicable, neither derived nor extrapolated, but wrought by the inscrutable power and goodness of God.”<sup>2</sup>

Can we still be surprised by grace? Are we open to a new possibility? Do we truly believe in the inscrutable power and goodness of God? This Sunday we recognize the saints of the church, those who have gone before us and laid the paths that we walk on today. And I think it is instructive to take a glance backward to see the movement of God in the journey of faith that is PCO.

In 2003, PCO member Elaine Davis wrote a marvelous document detailing the early history of all the Presbyterian congregations that have existed in Meridian Township<sup>3</sup>. There have been three congregations, the first two short-lived. The Session Minute Book for the first congregation is preserved at the Bentley Historical Library at the Univ. of Michigan. No minute book has been located for the second. The third congregation is our present congregation.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann. *The Message of the Psalms. A Theological Commentary*. Augsburg Press. 1984. p123.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p123-124

<sup>3</sup> Elaine C. Davis, *The Presbyterian Congregations in Meridian Township*. March 2003.

On September 27, 1843, eight people met at the home of Stephen D. Alverson in the northeastern part of Meridian Township to organize the First Presbyterian Church of Meridian. The population of what became known as Meridian Township at the time of the 1840 census was approximately fifty people. Families lived on scattered farms but no villages had yet been established in the forest and swamps of the new township. Davis writes that religious needs were met by traveling preachers of various denominations who occasionally visited to baptize, marry and bury, to preach and to help organize new congregations. This First Presbyterian Church of Meridian first met in each other's homes. According to the Session Minutes, in 1844 they met in the schoolhouse near Pine Lake (known now as Lake Lansing).

Rev. William G. Smith, from Lyons MI was the first minister. The congregation grew slowly over the years, and in 1847 Rev. Merrit M. Harmon became pastor. In 1853, when the last entry was made in the existing Session minute book, the congregation numbered 36. At a meeting earlier this year, I shared some of the Session minutes from this first congregation with our current Session. Much of the minutes are perfunctory and could easily be from our own minutes – reports of new members, of celebrations of the Lord's Supper, and who will attend the regional Presbytery meeting (a much bigger undertaking when traveling by horseback). Other portions of the minutes are more unique – reports to Session about “public rumors about the Christian character of one of the members.”<sup>4</sup> Following an investigation, charges were leveled against this member for admitting and encouraging dancing at his own house on or about Dec. 11, 1845. There was also a report that this same gentleman yielded to a fit of passion, stripped off his coat and offered to fight. There was examination and cross-examination of witnesses (somehow a violin was involved) and at the end of the Session inquiry the gentleman was “suspended from communion of the church.” The act of suspension was reported from the pulpit on the next Sunday. Now that would make for some interesting sermons, wouldn't it. There is a happy ending, as this gentleman made a full confession and penitence to the Session in 1852 and was restored to the fellowship of the church. I suppose it is not a completely happy ending, as the church closed the following year in 1853.

Davis writes that there appears to have been no active Presbyterian congregation in Meridian Township for the next nine years until the Presbyterian Church of Okemos was organized on March 9, 1864 in the Okemos schoolhouse. The Rev. Alfred Bryant, who had been the circuit rider preaching occasionally, was called as the pastor. We don't have Session minutes from this congregation, but we do know that around 1865 a church building was erected on the northeast corner of Moore street, facing the plank road, the highway from Lansing to Detroit which was graveled about 1880 and renamed Hamilton Road. It took a few years for the building to be completed – money was tight. When completed, it cost \$2,300 and was furnished with a bell and cabinet organ. We don't know the details of the capital campaign, but Davis shares a report from the *Lansing State Republican* newspaper on January 2, 1867 that the ladies of the church “held a Festival at the house of E. Walker ... The object was to raise

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<sup>4</sup> Transcript of a photocopy of the original Session records of the First Presbyterian Church of Meridian from the original records at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan. These entries are from pages 10-15 of the transcript.

funds to enable the committee to complete the Church now being built in this place. Everything went off harmonious; and the attendance was large. The amount received was \$40.00."<sup>5</sup>

Friends, these are the saints of our church. Men and women who sacrificed and scrimped and saved. Men and women who had a vision to form to community where they could support each other through the vagaries of a hard life in what was a remote area of the new state of Michigan. As we celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the current Presbyterian Church of Okemos this year, I want to also highlight the commitment of those men and women who pooled their resources and believed in the inscrutable power and goodness of God.

Next week is Dedication Sunday, when we will bless our commitments of financial resources, time and talent. This is our opportunity to express gratitude for the saints of the past on whose shoulders we stand. For those whose vision, dedication, and commitment to the work of the Lord shaped who we are today. For those who were generous in sharing their gifts, whatever their size, knowing the church thrives when the community is committed to its support. Those like Chris Doemel, in whose honor we will dedicate our music rooms this morning.

This is our opportunity to give thanks for the saints of the present church. For the saints who give of their time selflessly whether it is providing hospitality so family and friends can share memories of a loved one after a memorial service to maintaining our beautiful facility and grounds to teaching and nurturing our children and youth to glorifying God through music. The pledges we make help us plan for the year – staff, programs, tending the environment, and serving others. Our financial commitments and commitments of time and talent help us build deeper relationships in the here and now. They support our work to be faithful to our mission statement to invite everyone to join the lifelong journey of faith that is life in Jesus Christ and to build a network of caring relationships between families, friends, and strangers by offering welcome, healing, justice and peace to all in the name of Jesus Christ.

Next week as we dedicate our gifts, we will also express our gratitude for our future. You will hear in a moment from Emily Conroy-Krutz and Jeff Arbour, co-chairs of our Journey to 2030 strategic visioning task force about ways we are called to commit to shaping our future. And during our education hour today, you will have an opportunity to add your voice to this process. Please stay and join in the conversation. Who is God calling us to be? In seven years, in seventy years, in 170 years, who will PCO be expressing gratitude to for their vision, dedication, and commitment to the mission and ministry of PCO?

Next week is Dedication Sunday. I invite you to prayerfully consider how you will express your gratitude for the past, the present and the future. And to prayerfully consider your call to be a “future saint” of the church. If you have not received a stewardship packet, there are brochures and pledge cards on the table just outside the sanctuary doors. Join me in prayer.

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine C. Davis, The Presbyterian Congregations in Meridian Township. March 2003; p3.