**Worship Service November 12, 2023**

**Announcements:** Today we are welcoming Pastor Elizabeth Turner. Just a reminder that the church office will be closed on November 23rd and 24th. Pre-school will be singing on Sunday the 19th. **2:11 North: “What a Friend We Have In Jesus”**  **Lighting of the Christ Candle:** Let’s be in an attitude of prayer, as we light our Christ candle.“Light of Christ, shine on our path. Chase away all darkness. Illuminate our pathways. And lead us to the heart of God.” Amen.**2:11 North: “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty” Children’s Chat: Children’s Chat –** So I would like to take the liberty of doing the children's sermon, a little bit differently than usual and hi, I see you I see several humans in here who look like they might not be adults yet, so what I'm gonna ask you to do is tell us all your names loud enough that we can hear Elizabeth Elizabeth morning hi yeah and who's this one Elizabeth an April and Brandon Landon, Elizabeth April and Landon hey thank you so much for being here. I hope you enjoy hi I hope you enjoy the great fall, decorations of pumpkins and harvest times and the beautiful colors in the stained-glass window and you know I am not. I'm not usually here as you may know so I'm excited to get to meet you but here's the secret and don't tell the adults that I'm terrible at children's sermons. I'm just terrible at them it's it's not pretty it's not good so I thought that what might be better would be for everybody to help tell you something that you really need to know and that everybody can participate and giving you the children's sermon this morning so Elizabeth and April and Landon here's what we want you to know can everybody say with me here in a moment Elizabeth we are thankful for you April. We are thankful for you and Landon. We are thankful for you. Can you help do that everyone and then after that can you say with me Elizabeth we will pray for you this week April we will pray for you this week Landon we will pray for you this week. Can you say that with me because it's so great for kids to know and hear that the people in this church and the body of Christ love them and are for them and are thinking about them and are on their side so in a moment here say with me, Elizabeth, we are thankful for you OK Elizabeth we are thankful for you and then what are we going to do for her this week? Elizabeth we are going to pray for you yeah and now let's let Landon. Have a turn so say with me Landon, we are thankful for you Landon we are praying for you this week and April. We're gonna have to be loud cause I think she had a situation but we'll let's say it loudly April we are thankful for you April. We are praying for you this week. That is some of the most important things that kids can hear from the adults and from the folks in the church and that's a better children's sermon. Yeah, that's a better children's sermon than I can give let's take this moment, and this opportunity to share in our ties and offerings to offer up to God from that which God has given us if the ushers will come forward perfect

**Offering** Offerings today, we ask that you would take them as thanks and praise that you would take them. Multiply them and put them to use for your kingdom through this church. In Jesus name amen. Yes, please be seated as we go to God and pray what's thanksgivings what praises joys and requests are on your heart today? Oh, and he says he said celebrating an engagement. Any other things on your hearts? So I dislocated my shoulder in the football game Friday night. I got praises and prayer requests there's one from Trinity that we shared this morning as some of you know, I Jeff R through the SPRC and I have met him and that he and his wife Sherry their grandson Levi is in Akron children's he had been a very ill with a virus and I've been a later, but the more critical thing at the moment is that they discovered in the process of that are that he has leukemia, and so within just a few days they went from mom and a couple of the kids being sick to Levi being very sick to finding out that he has leukemia and starting chemotherapy already. so he has been in the ICU and they are looking at a long road of chemotherapy. He'll likely be in the hospital for several months with treatment on going after that and so they have set up a go fund me account and some fundraisers around town to support this family but if you could keep the family in your prayers and Levi Buxman as well and his family driving back-and-forth to Akron every day as well all right will you got your heads with me? **Prayer:** God, we are so thankful that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness is not overcoming you walk with us each step every day and we give you things that you have given us today. Thank you for this community. Thank you for this congregation. Thank you for the people gathered here to worship you to give you thanks, and we pray for each burden on each heart, the spoken and unspoken prayer requests the praises struggles we pray for those who are ill and sick that you would heal their bodies that you would give their doctors and nurses wisdom that you would sustain them through the battles that nobody sees we pray for those who are worshiping with us from a distance, we pray for those whose mobility is limited we pray for those in long-term care, facilities, or who are living at home or ill or who are unable to travel, and we asked that they would sense in a very special real way your presence with them that your grace would chase them down wherever they are and that they would know that they are loved and valuable part of this worship community. We thank you for the kids were here today. We thank you for the kids were in this community and we ask that you would help them this week at school. You would help them as they go about schoolwork as they go about play, God that you would meet what ever need their heart has. I know how much you love them. We are thankful for the good things you are doing in our community in our hearts and in our world and we also lift up the hurts, the hardships and the sufferings in our community and in our world, and we pray in Jesus name for peace. That You would bring peace that you would remind us that you alone are all powerful and God we pray that you would show us opportunities to love others, and your name we ask all of these things thanking you for your goodness through your son, Jesus Christ, and remembering the words that you taught us crane our father, who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us, not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**Hymn of Preparation: “Great is Thy Faithfulness”** **Scripture**: Acts 2:37-47 **Message “*Thankfulness in Community*”:** The scripture reading is from Acts 2 37:47. When the people heard this, this being Peter sermon at Pentecost explaining that they had just crucified the Messiah. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your Children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord, our God will call” With many other words. He warned them and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3000 were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the Apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts, they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily, those who were being saved. It is so wonderful to be able to be here with you this morning. And it's a privilege. The first time I think I came over to this church was last spring as the SPRC’s met together and there was just a sweet spirit. So, if no one tells you that regularly, there is a sweet spirit in this congregation that you can sense when you come in. And I hope that you know that I walked in and heard the hymns that were being played on the piano this morning. And one of them, I can still tell you the hymn number of that song in my childhood hymnal because it was my favorite. And if we had something on Sunday nights where you could request your favorite hymn to sing my hand would shoot up and say, can we please sing 106? He lives. So, thank you for allowing me to be here with you this morning. I recognize that this passage about Pentecost. First of all, it’s liturgical, the liturgical season. It's not Pentecost, right? That's in the spring. And second of all, it might not seem like the most obvious choice for a theme of Thanksgiving and gratitude. If you grew up in the church, in particular, you might expect something like Psalm 100 enter his courts with Thanksgiving, enter his courts with praise or you might expect something from first Thessalonians 5: Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Or if you think about gratitude and Thanksgiving, you might think about some of the great articles or books that are out there being produced on the benefits of gratitude for your brain. These nerdy neuroscientists are out here monitoring people's brains and can see certain areas and special MRIs. They can see certain areas of the brain light up depending on what that person is doing or thinking about. You know, in fact, practices of gratitude can even help grow gray matter in certain areas of your brain. So when you practice gratitude or thankfulness, if you write a letter of gratitude or thankfulness, something like that, you can even have more activity in certain areas of your brain. They can see that light up on these functional MRIs, I think that’s fascinating. I love it. Intentionally practicing gratitude can lower your stress. I think that's fascinating. I love it. So then, with things like Psalm 100 or First Thessalonians five or the amazing way that God has created our brains, you might wonder. Ok. Well, why, why not push on those? Well, I wanna focus on something else today because most of us gathered here, hear these kinds of texts with our American ears and our American ears. Hear things in a certain way. Enter his gates with Thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks in all circumstances. For this is God's will for you, not for all circumstances, but in all circumstances give thanks. This is God's will for you. But if we rewind that a little bit, that’s an old word. We don't even have tapes anymore. I can't keep up with technology. But if we rewind that a little bit, the very first verse and first Thessalonians, we read Paul Silas and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians. Grace and peace to you and to you would be like my Mother-in-Law from Texas would say it all y'all grace and peace to all y’all to you guys, grace and peace to the gathered community. So, then it's still applicable to individuals, but it's a little different. If you think about the gathered church being all together and listening to this letter from Paul read aloud and all together, they're hearing. Give thanks, all together your entire group in all circumstances. For this is God's will for you. In all circumstances, your group may encounter or endure together, not just individually a lone ranger-free zone. If we rewind a little bit in Psalm 100 again, what do we find? Shout for joy to the Lord. All the earth. That's not just one gathered congregation. All the earth. Shout for joy. Know the Lord is God, he made us and we are his. We don't just enter God's gates with Thanksgiving as individuals. It's not all on you to muster up gratitude alone. We are entering God's Gates with Thanksgiving together. We are God’s. So those individual habits of gratitude are really important. Like the neuroscientists will tell you when they slide you into a special MRI and watch your brain light up. Those are important habits. But how do we practice gratitude together or even in front of each other as a community? What is it in Christian community that we are incubating? And what is it about Christian community that incubates gratitude and Thanksgiving? So now maybe we could circle back to those early Christians that early church anointed by the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. But can I say something really quick in a culture, the profits off of keeping TV and radio and online audiences stressed and outraged. Is there anything more countercultural, more revolutionary, more unexpected, more surprising than people who are characterized by joy and gratitude and giving thanks. Try this, maybe you've done this before. Try this, next time you go out to eat, ask to see the manager, their blood pressure will probably go up a little bit, ask to see the manager and then just tell them, you know, it’s been a hard few years for the workforce and that it's not easy working with the public every day. And that you just wanted to say thank you for their work and that they showed up to work today. Or the next time you go to the doctor or the pharmacy, catch one of the nurses, catch your physician and say, you know, I know it's been a hard few years for health care workers. And I know a lot of you are burned out and I just wanted to say thank you for showing up today. It makes a difference to me. And I appreciate your care for my body and trying to help keep me healthy even if I don't follow your advice consistently. But thank you, it makes a difference. And I hope you feel seen and appreciated. If you do something like that, if you take the time to see them and notice them, you will see how powerful it is. Just to say, thank you to someone who just doesn't hear it very often. And I know they're stressed because I know how long the lines are at the pharmacy. Every time I try to go new faces of trying to pull people in from other locations to fill the staffing the fruits of the spirit, the overflow, the harvest, the produce of the spirit. They don't just power our witness. They are our witness, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control. It takes the fruits of the spirit to be thankful, to express gratitude. It takes patience to slow down and notice what someone's doing and comment on it and think at them for it. It takes self-control to bite your tongue and to not complain at the one millionth time they've gotten something wrong on your order. It takes gentleness to stop and take a deep breath and see the human in front of you. But these fruits, this produces this harvest of the Holy Spirit in our lives in this world, in our culture. That is the witness. First Peter 3:15 puts it this way. Always be prepared, be like a boy scout, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. And I am sure that each of you here today knows someone in your life that if you express hope, they will say, don’t you see our world? How on earth do you live each day with hope? And you may answer something like well because of what Jesus has done for me. Because when I dug myself into a hole. I couldn't get out of, God showed up. Because on the darkest day of my life, God’s grace didn't let me go. Because I know that the Brokenness of the world is real. I know that. And I also know that the power and grace and love of God are realer because I can't explain the mysteries of how our universe works. Science tries to look at how it works, but it can't answer why? Why is a theology question? It's a philosophy question. And so even if you never believe in Jesus Christ, I think it's reasonable to believe in God because the gravity keeps working every morning. Thankfully, I don't wake up floating on the ceiling. That constant is there. Why science can't answer the why? It can try to describe what it sees. We're all sitting, you're not floating. Why do you have hope? Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. What hope is there in the Rust Belt? When factories close, people lose their jobs move away. What hope is there in the Middle East? What hope is there in the floods of South Sudan? What hope is there in Texas? What hope is there in Maine? What hope is there in Narcan factories? When we see the ways that our world is hurting and suffering and broken? We can say with Mr Rogers, very wise mom, look for the helpers and that's a good thing to do. Look at the people who are at work, helping others. And we can also say when we see the ways our world is broken, we can say with good common sense, we look at all the good things that happened this week that didn't make the headlines. Those things don't make the headlines, but they're happening. Babies are born, people are getting sober, marriages repaired, unnecessary kindness, shown to someone in need, all kinds of good things that just don't make it to the headlines and those things are true as well. Ultimately, as Christians, we have an “and” with those “and” our hope is in Jesus Christ. Dr Joanne Lyon was a general superintendent of the Wesleyan Church. She was the first woman, general superintendent of the Wesleyan Church, the denomination I grew up in and she was also founder of an international relief organization called World Hope International. And this is someone who uh her relief work has taken her places like the White House, the UN, the Faith Committee of the World Economic Forum, the kinds of places I tend to only hear about on the news, I read about, but I don't spend my time getting invited to the World Economic Forum and these are circles that she has found herself in. She expresses so clearly the relationship between rolling up our sleeves and getting active to meet the needs of others in the name of Jesus Christ that we believe along with that, that Jesus Christ is our hope. When she first started an organization, there was a bad civil war going on in Sierra Leone and a lot of people lost limbs. So multiple relief organizations came in to provide prosthetics. They provided physical therapy fittings, they provided prosthetic arms and legs to the thousands and thousands of people who had lost limbs. And word reached her that uh one of the gentlemen made a comment because there were multiple relief organizations with centers fitting prosthetics. But he said, I always refer acquaintances and friends to the World Hope Center. He said, because I told them God is there, God is there. People don't have to even know what they believe to sense something different about you. People don't even have to believe in God to sense God's presence at work in your life. They may not know what to call it. They may not know how to describe it. They may not know how to name it. They may just know that they are drawn to you like someone is drawn to a flame or a fireplace because around you there is peace or hope or warmth. That's what the Holy Spirit does in us. And for us and Dr Lyon who has sat with the World Economic Forum and been to the White House and worked with people at the UN and all these different things says this. If all the world's problems could be solved by money and initiatives, they could have done it by now. But they can’t. And this is where the specific hope of Jesus Christ comes in. All those things are good and still not the hope of Jesus Christ. So she has had world leaders telling her we are going to need our faith organizations, our faith based organizations, we need faith communities being involved. This is too big. What is it about Christian community that incubates, gratitude and thanksgiving and hope. What are we incubating together? Let's explore a few quick features of this passage from Acts. This community broke all kinds of social and demographic expectations and rules who you eat with is powerful. It is an unlikely bunch to put it mildly that we find gathered together in Acts 2. It would be like bringing together senators and barbers, college professors, landscapers, people of all different citizenships and languages, education levels, bank accounts, people with mobility challenges and athletes side by side. Folks who go to adult daycare centers alongside and with learning professionals. What brought them together? What Peter said? Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And it goes on to tell us that 3000 people were added to their number that day. From over 100 women and men gathered in the upper room praying 3000 people added that day. That may sound a bit unlikely like a fisherman's story. But I was in Wilmore, Kentucky last winter. I've never seen anything like it. I, you’ve lived several years in Wilmore, quite a few. I know that small town. If you said Elizabeth, do you think it's advisable for thousands of people to clog a tiny town overnight? Standing in the cold in long lines together for hours? I mean, over six hours in line sometimes and we’re going to bring in who are wearing facemasks, people who speak other languages and don't speak English all ages, all races, folks with political shirts on for one side or for the other. We're going to bring in Kentucky good old boys and folks who believe chewing tobacco, spit in a bottle on the table in the lobby next to seminary professors and pastors. We're going to bring in some ex-cons and some mothers with young babies and we're going to put them all in line and make them wait for hours in line together in the cold. Do you think that's a great security situation? Elizabeth. Do you think that that's advisable? How many fights do you think will break out? Not if. How many? Multiple weeks of this went on and the police, the local police commented we haven't had a single fight, not a single pull people apart, separate them. Cool off. None. I've never seen anything like it. And as I watched this car drive past this elderly woman was inside and she was looking at the crowds, thousands of people crammed into the semi-circle of Asbury College campus. She's looking at the crowds and her face is lit up like Christmas morning. And I thought she looks like she's seen her prayers answered. And then I thought, oh, that's because I think she's seen her prayers answered. She saw me through the window and I just smiled at her and she smiled at me and blew me a kiss through the window. And then the traffic moved on. I thought she has been praying for this and she is seeing her prayers answered in front of her eyes. So when I read something like this happening in Acts 2, I think, oh, I have a frame of reference for that. I have seen unlikely crowds come together, hungry for Jesus Christ and for the power of the Holy Spirit. I’ve seen unlikely people standing in line together, no fights, no arrests. In Acts, what brought them together was putting their faith in Jesus Christ being filled with the spirit then practicing their faith. That's what flipped everything upside down. What is it about Christian community that incubates gratitude and Thanksgiving. First and foremost, our shared gratitude to God for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is something we remember. Every time we have Communion. The Great Thanksgiving, the Eucharist, that means Thanksgiving. We give thanks for Jesus Christ. And so we are together expressing our individual and our communal thanks to God for God's grace at work in our personal lives and in our relationships and in our shared life together. Now, if you read Acts, you know, things go south pretty quickly for these believers, they get hard, they get really hard, Stephen getting stoned hard, Saul, standing watching over the coats while Stephen gets stoned hard. But here at the beginning, we see Christian community in action and what do we see? What are we told? They devoted themselves to the Apostles, teaching to fellowship to the breaking of bread, eating together, and a prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the Apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had needs. Every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts in their formal worship space and they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of the people. You know, I think, I wonder if God allowed these early believers a chance to practice these healthy habits that would be the glue when things got tough and violence scattered the Church later. If they hadn't had this time to get to know each other, to eat together, to pray, to learn from the Apostles. If they didn't have that time helping to cover each other's needs and giving thanks and eating foods from other cultures, learning to communicate across language barriers. If they hadn't lived like this in this moment, would they have been shaped into the people they needed to be, to be able later to welcome Saul into their midst, to forgive Saul who was there when her brother Stephen died to allow Saul in you say you had an experience on the Damascus Road. And God taps this very kind man on the shoulder. Ananias and says, look, yes, Saul was coming to arrest you and your loved ones and everything you hold most dear, but it's ok. You can trust me. He's a believer now only by the grace of God. Do you let that guy in the one who's been persecuting your friends and you dragging women and men off to jail? The way the community is shaped allows them to be the people they need to be. By the time Saul is ready to become Paul, the habits we shape in times of peace, sustain us in times of trouble. What is it about the Christian community that incubates gratitude and Thanksgiving. They learned, they learned from the Apostle's teaching, they spent time together, they forged bonds, they got to know each other. They learned about each other's backgrounds, they ate, they prayed, and they bore witness the miracles that couldn't be explained in any other way. Their faith was strengthened. Those with more than enough shared their extra and those with not enough now had enough. They sold assets for each other's well-being. That's not a small thing if someone is disinherited for becoming a Christian, by the way, they met together at the temple and they met in homes and they ate with glad and sincere hearts. There's a simplicity there, there's a child likeness there with glad and sincere hearts, praising God, vulnerable widows with few ways to earn income. Now knew where their meals were coming from. Lonely people found community, culturally siloed, people were able to learn across languages and cultural barriers. They shared the experience of all being learners. They learned from the Apostles teaching. And of course, as we know from Romans that included Dunia outstanding among the Apostles along with other women who were co-laborers for Christ with Paul. What is it about Christian community that incubates gratitude and Thanksgiving Faith in Jesus Christ unites beyond culture, beyond economic status, beyond bank account, beyond ability or disability, geography, appearance, job, marital status, criminal background, citizenship. What magazines you subscribe to whether you sing God save the King or the Star-Spangled Banner or the Japanese anthem. Whether someone lives where there are monsoon seasons or in the southern hemisphere where they're now gearing up for summer. I was surprised to learn that Australians eat strawberries at Christmas time. It's because that's their summer time. Blew my mind, across all these things. What is it that unites Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ. It does not ignore, it doesn't ignore differences or challenges or histories or wounds. Wesley didn't ignore it. John Wesley said we failed to take care of the poor because we don't spend time with them. This is part of why they made nasty political satire, cartoons of John Wesley and the early Methodists and people didn't respond well when he said things like that. But when we get to know across these lines and we get wrapped up in the concerns of our sisters and brothers in Christ, we see the reality of the challenges or the burdens that they are carrying and we can't help but be thankful when our fellow believers see us hear us apologize or make amends when needed and work on our behalf. As Christians, we carry the corners of each other's stretchers, like the friends who carried their buddy to Jesus to be lowered down through the roof. That is our story. That's who we are. In church We pray, we give thanks, we learn from scripture. We give thanks. In church Everybody eats, no one goes hungry. We give thanks. We sometimes see miraculous and explicable divine intervention and give thanks. Sometimes we see the miracle of radical generosity and we give thanks, everyone has something to offer. Because the Holy Spirit gives us unique gifts from the youngest to the oldest. The kids have something to bring. The 99-year-old has something to bring this is who we are in the Holy Spirit. And so this is part of what transcends time and geography. When I learn about something from the church, from another time or from another place, I'm thankful that encourages me. One of the world's largest mission movements is based out of South Korea. South Korea sends lots of missionaries to a lot of different places around the world. The largest church in the world is in South Korea. Over 400,000 members. There are churches that have 24/7 prayer rooms. There are monasteries where monks are up at in the middle of the night. A couple times praying for the world. I hear these things and I give thanks that strengthens my faith. That encourages me. When I read about 100 and 20 years ago in Northern India, a woman in India named Pandita Ramahi leading a revival among the people there. Big revival, huge. And that was over 100 years ago. This was happening and I learned about her life and the work she did for Jesus Christ. And this is someone I've never met. But her life is a testimony and an encouragement to me. And I give thanks. She encourages me. She strengthens my faith. I've never met her. She was long gone before I was born. But her story, I'm, it makes me thankful. We share our testimonies with each other one-on-one in groups or in services. And also the testimonies of people from other places. And other times when I develop habits of telling you, thank you or why I'm thankful for you. Then we're practicing repeating the good stories of what God's grace is doing in our midst. It's not denial of suffering, not denial of the challenges we face, but it's practicing being who God is shaping us to be. So what does the congregation incubate? What is growing in your midst? What is ready to hatch? How can a congregation, the body of Christ? How can we incubate, Thanksgiving and gratitude? The defining thing about any body is not what it lacks or what it has To find anything about any congregation is Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. And when we practice habits of shared gratitude, telling each other the good things that God is doing in our lives. When we practice relating what God has provided or where grace has shown up in your week or where you needed help. And the Holy Spirit helped you when we're known as people who go out of their way to express genuine gratitude will become known as people who have hope and joy even in the midst of whatever life throws at us. And when we're known as people of hope, we'll start getting the question, “How can you have hope?” and then you'll have the opportunity to answer it and you'll already have practiced expressing gratitude to God and to others for God and for others. This week,how can you be on a mission of thankfulness, practicing the story of God's goodness at work in your life? Will you bow your heads and pray with me? God, I thank you for the life of each person here who has in some way responded to your grace through the power of the Holy Spirit. We ask that this week you would anoint them with your presence in Jesus' name. Amen. Will you stand for the closing hymn number 62 all creatures of our God and King.

 **closing song** is **“All Creatures of Our God and King”**

**Benediction** May God’s grace sustain you, warm you and lift your burdens this week as you thank God speak well of the grace that is at work in your life this week. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy spirit, Amen.