

We come to worship in the tradition of our Jewish forebears and Jesus himself who went to the synagogue regularly on the 7th day, the Sabbath Day, a Day to keep Holy as the commandment says, “Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy!” Keeping it Holy means thinking about God our Creator and being thankful for all the good gifts of this creation. When we think about God, I think about the quality of Goodness (Ps.23: Surely Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life) So Thank God is Thank Goodness! Another “G” word of course is Grace. We are thankful to Grace, which is a little more specific... more like unearned Gifts, forgiveness of sins, surprising good fortune. The composer of Amazing Grace, John Newton, would have identified with the forgiveness of sins part, for sure; we know he was a slave trader. So Amazing Grace, to John Newton, surely meant a radical change of life, that truly “saved a wretch” like him. If the shoe fits, wear it, but I like very much the saying of one elderly lady to another: “I’m not a wretch, and I don’t think you are either!”

I want us all to simply remember some reasons for gratitude in our lives.... Psalm 103, encourages us to “forget not all God’s benefits,” all God’s Graces, or Gifts we have received in life. Psalm 103 lists some of them: forgiveness of sins, healing from diseases or a deep Pit, love and mercy, satisfied with “good” as long as we live.... There is that word “good” again. Psalm 23 and Psalm 103... There is Goodness, all the days of our lives, if we are open to seeing it.

I know that there is plenty to complain about, plenty of personal aches and pains (and it is valid and helpful to be honest about sorrow.) But the attitude of Bible, of Jews and Christians, is to make a point to give thanks, make it our intention to give

thanks, make it a “discipline” even, to give thanks! In some families it is a custom to give thanks at suppertime, and perhaps also at bedtime... Being thankful for good things of the day!

We can be thankful for goodness and grace from God in a direct way, an inner experience, like connection to the feelings of goodness, love and joy a kind of direct communion with Divine Spirit..... But most of the time I think we experience goodness and grace as coming to us through other people! That is why worship with other people is so important; it is *in relationship* that we find ourselves most fully human, most able to experience the graces of God, the peace, love and joy that God promises! Paul says to the Philippians that he thanks God “every time I remember you,” “constantly praying with joy.” Commentators refer to this letter as one of Paul’s most intimate letters. He knew the church people there well!

Whether it was today or yesterday, or many years ago, we can give thanks for good things in our lives, for kind actions, for loving smiles, for mercy. I know that many of us wonder about our memory and don’t remember all we want of today or yesterday, but often we have memories of things long ago that “stand out” in our memory! One Psalm (42) says “I remember how I went with the crowds to the temple, rejoicing and giving thanks!” It creates hope and promise that “I will again praise God,” that goodness and mercy *will* follow me all my life, times of laughter and joy, that I have known in the past, *will* always come again to us!

So it is good to shift gears and remember for a moment a past grace, as guarantee of future grace! If anyone is brave, you could share a cherished memory, a story of Grace or Goodness,

even from long ago, as it gives us courage for our present and future.....

There are so many things about our parents, or favorite teachers, kind neighbors, mentors, or times with good friends. We could be here all day!

Let me share just one thing from my parents: the gift of music (and good music is surely a gift from God!). My Dad could play well by ear; he so enjoyed sitting at the living room piano playing his favorite songs! Tenderly, Stardust, Narcissus?, not to mention Rudolph, Frosty, It Came Upon a Midnight Clear... My mother loved classical music, so all us 4 children got piano lessons to learn a little Mozart, Chopin, Beethoven, etc. It was indeed work, to sit and practice, to not go out to play baseball until doing 30 minutes at the piano! But it was also Grace, a Gift from my Mom, to know that it takes practice, even for the most gifted child. It was also a Grace or Gift, that my Mom would listen closely to all us kids' practice sessions... either sitting by the piano, or close by in the kitchen, Praising or correcting as needed.

When I think of our aging memories, I know that music is something deep in every memory! I bet we all can think of a favorite song, even from a long time ago. And when a really famous song is played, most of us can remember the words, *by heart*! Yes, our memory is not just in our heads, but we carry memories in our hearts, and also in our bodies!

So I need to share one vivid music memory, because I think it was in my head, my heart, and my body! Many of you have had this experience, I'm sure... a song that brings tears to the eyes! It was the day of my ordination to Christian ministry, and I was standing in the foyer in the back of the church, ready to walk

down the aisle with some other ministers in robes. The opening hymn was, maybe you could guess it: Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee... Good Ol' BEETHOVEN. So beautiful, that the tears came, tears of joy (and also perhaps some awe or trepidation about entering ordained ministry.)

In Beethoven's Ode to Joy, the music fits the words so well, that the whole thing can lift the mind and heart to some other dimension, to some height of glory. I had the opportunity to play the Ode to Joy on the big organ next door once at the close of an interfaith ordination ceremony. I "opened up the stops" as the saying goes, and let the organ ring, with volume and grandeur, through the rafters. Not having practiced on this organ here, let me just share Beethoven's Ode to Joy on Helen Hatcher's lovely grand piano. I'll bet some of the words come back to you, but mostly I hope you enjoy the heavenly music of Mr. Beethoven; I hope it can transport you to memories of times of love and joy! Amen.