

Scripture: Psalm 116:1-20

Message: Thanksgiving

December 30, 2018; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON

New Years Eve

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The end of another year. 12 months. 364 days. So many ordinary events. Some milestone events. A lot of everything happened during this past year.

Some of those events we might like to forget. Some were so memorable, it's hard to forget. Some of the scars and hurts are still felt, so we can't forget.

Sometimes we can get so busy with the present or so wrapped up in planning for the future that we forget about the importance of pausing to remember, to reflect. Or we think the past is over and gone, so it's more important to move forward and not dwell on the past.

But taking time to remember does not mean dwelling on the past. Remembering and reflecting is learning from the past, identifying important principles that are part of our past experiences, and building on that for the future.

Psalm 116 is a psalm of remembering. It is part of a section of Psalms (from Psalm 113-118) that were part of the Jewish liturgy used at the great religious festivals. At the celebration of the Passover, Psalm 113 and 114 were sung before the meal and Psalm 115-118 were sung after the meal.

When we read this psalm and read the word "I" it could be an individual person speaking. In worship, it could also be a collective testimony, as God's people spoke together of God's love and kindness.

As part of the Passover celebration, this psalm would celebrate deliverance from slavery in Egypt. In Jewish interpretation every follower of God is to view themselves as having been personally delivered from Egypt, making the "I" in the song all the more fitting for that occasion. Each person speaking the words of this psalm remembered slavery and deliverance and speaks with thanksgiving and praise to the Lord.

When this psalm is read outside of the Passover, like this morning, it is an honest testimony of the journey with God. Deliverance and freedom includes remembering times of struggle and sorrow. In those times, we call on the Lord and he is gracious.

Deliverance and freedom includes celebrating God's blessing and protection. It includes trust, even when things seem to be going wrong.

Remembering God's presence and care in the past helps us to be confident of his

continued care and blessing in the present and future.

Remembering is more than sitting and looking back. Remembering also inspires action. As we recall the Lord's many blessings, we respond with a willing heart eager to continue living for God.

For Israel, this psalm reminded them of deliverance from Egypt. As we reflect on the past year, we do so in the context of our relationship with God through Jesus. We remember that he came to live and die and rise again, that we may know the forgiving love of God. Through Jesus, we are God's children who can trust in the loving care of a faithful Father.

This morning, in our service, we take time to remember. Different verses from Psalm 116 identify aspects of that remembering, those varied experiences of this past year, both sad and joyful. In those various sections of our service, you are invited to come forward as a testimony of remembering and trust. You may light a candle that represents your trust in the light of the Lord in times of darkness and in times of celebration. If you wish, you may share your story of trust as a testimony of God's love and grace and working in your life. Do not feel obligated to do so, but you may. Our remembering today is intended to give praise to our God who has faithfully walked with us and continues to walk with us. Our God carries us and rejoices with us.

May our remembering, our sharing, inspire and encourage us to walk in trust and thanksgiving with our Lord.

Ps 116:1-2

I love the LORD, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.

Because he turned his ear to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.

Let us call on the Lord in worship and praise him in his mercy and kindness

Psalm 116:3-4

The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave came over me;

I was overcome by distress and sorrow.

Then I called on the name of the LORD: "LORD, save me!"

Times of difficulty and trouble were very real. Sickness, death, uncertainty

Psalm 116:5-9

The LORD is gracious and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.

The LORD protects the unwary;
when I was brought low, he saved me.

Return to your rest, my soul,
for the LORD has been good to you.

For you, LORD, have delivered me from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling,
that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

Experiences of God's faithfulness and blessing, presence and protection

Psalm 116:10-11

I trusted in the LORD when I said, "I am greatly afflicted;"
in my alarm I said, "Everyone is a liar."

Experiences of doubt, being overwhelmed

Psalm 116:12-14

What shall I return to the LORD
for all his goodness to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD.

I will fulfill my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.

We give thanks to the Lord

Psalm 116:15-20

Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of those faithful to him.

Truly I am your servant, LORD;
I am your servant, as was my mother before me;
you have loosed my bonds of affliction.

I will sacrifice a thank offering to you
and call on the name of the LORD.

I will fulfill my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
in the courts of the house of the LORD—
in your midst, Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD!

Having lived in trust and thanks, we commit to continuing our lives in trust and thanks and praise to the Lord.

God, with your help we have come here, *To the end of another year,*
Some bearing smiles, *Others bearing scars.*

Heal us where we are wounded. *Sort us where we are confused.*
Sweeten us where we are bitter. *Open us where we are shut-down.*

For all the ways you've revolutionized our hearts and minds this year *We give thanks.*
For the improvements to our character, *We give thanks.*
For challenges tackled and trials endured, *We give thanks.*
For disappointments that have re-oriented us, *We give thanks.*
For pain that has disciplined us, *We give thanks.*
For love that has soothed us, *We give thanks.*
For the light of Christ, whose life has illumined the path of peace, *We give thanks.*

With trust in your faithfulness,
we commit ourselves to continue walking with you to your praise and glory. Amen !