
"A Very Special Thank You"

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 23:2-6 / Luke 23:35-43
Mariner Sands Chapel

Dr. Gary Carr
November 24, 2019

This Sunday we are taking a large portion of our time together to say a special thank you to our Transitional Minister, Roger Verse and his wife Selma. They served this congregation during the 2018-19 season, providing just the right amount of care and encouragement while we were going through a difficult period of change. Sometimes it was the calm and gentle way Roger said something to soothe our spiritual ache. In May, I remember our first Sunday with you. It was a day of both joy and sadness, since we were glad to be here and yet sad to say goodbye to Roger as our Interim. Here it was the end of a season and all the people that should be here had already departed for other places. So now, while many of those folks are back with us, we are saying a big thank you.

What makes this Sunday also very special is because in a few more days we will celebrate a holiday called Thanksgiving. We remember our American heritage in the winter of 1620 when pilgrims huddled to give thanks to God for helping them survive the harsh year. They had food, shelter, faith, and a future. Their journey here across the ocean to a wilderness was a very difficult journey that led to a beautiful destination. Sometimes in life, the hardest journeys lead to the most enjoyable destinations. In Romans 8:18, the Apostle Paul wrote: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Pilgrims suffered, but God brought them through the difficulty and established them on new ground where that were free to worship as they chose.

Which brings us to the Bible passage for this morning from Jeremiah and Luke. The words of the prophet bring great news of hope that the Lord "*...will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,*" In one way, this is what happened to those early settlers who fled religious persecution and found pasture in the New England. And godly men and women appointed shepherds for their souls and, in time, founded the greatest nation in the world. We have much to be thankful for.

And finally, we have the painful scene on Calvary, where Jesus is hanging on a cross between two criminals for breaking a law of both Romans and Jews. He claimed to be a King (a threat to Caesar's occupying army) and He claimed to be God (to the Jews, blasphemy). He could not lie, so when asked, Jesus told them the truth: He was the King of all kings and God with us. As he hangs on the cross, one man on his left is dying in his sin, rejecting God. Another man is dying to his sin, receiving God. And between them is the man who dies for sin, redeeming the world. He takes on the penalty of death for our sin and those of the whole world. He did what we could not do, He did what we would not do, and He did what He was sent to do. In a very special way, Jesus was God's transitional minister. The writer of Hebrews called Him a priest of the order of Melchizedek, Who, for a brief moment in time, soothed the spiritual ache of all our souls, and made atonement for our sin. How very great is our thanks.

So today really is a special day of thanks: we are thankful for three very special blessings. We thank God for sending us Jesus, for inspiring faithful pilgrims to establish a colony of the free, and for Roger and Selma Verse who shepherded this little flock, bringing healing and hope and joy.