

Everything has its time, the Preacher, Ecclesiastes wrote.

Born, die

Plant, sow

Keep, throw away

War, and peace

And although Ecclesiastes poetry doesn't explicitly say it, I think the writer would agree that there also a time to "Celebrate". Literally from the Latin, "To assemble to honor". In other words celebrations are for "we" not just "me".

Religious celebrations begin with acknowledgement of God, source of all creation, life, and its good gifts. In other words, we celebrate God—every Sunday, every day. The psalm writer of Psalm 148 was effervescent in praise, found God so worthy of praise that the writer invited not just people, but insisted that all creation get into the act.

Read it with your response:

¹ (Yay God!)

Praise YHWH from the heavens; praise God in the heights,

Praise God all you angels; praise God all you hosts!

Praise God sun and moon;

Praise God all you shining stars!

Praise God you highest heavens;

And you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the Name of YHWH by whose command they were
created. (Yay God!)

God established them forever and ever

And gave a decree which won't pass away.

Praise YHWH from the earth, you sea creatures and ocean depths,

Lightning and hail, snow and mist,

and storm winds that fulfill God's word, (Yay God!)

Mountains and all hills,

Fruits, trees and all cedars,

Wild animals and all cattle,

Small animals and flying birds,

Rulers of the earth, leaders of all nations

All the judges in the world,

Young men and young women,

Old people and children,

Let them all praise the Name of YHWH (Yay God!)

Let them all praise God

Whose Name alone is exalted,

Whose majesty transcends heaven and earth,

And who have raised up a Horn for God's people to the praise of the

faithful,

The children of Israel

The people dear to God!

Alleluia! (Yay God!

Our first celebration is of and for God. Then we come to the specifics.

Celebrations are occasions religious, secular, cultural, to say “hello”: a housewarming or school convocation or baptism, but also times to say “goodbye”. Not “goodbye, we’re glad you’re getting out of our hair” but to say we are a group of people who have enjoyed you, value you, and will miss you.

And celebrations mark rites of passage—anniversaries of marriages or church beginnings (almost 60 for FPC!) or birthdays.

And celebrations are ways to just plain say thank you for work well done, for ministry faithfully accomplished.

Marking life's transitions and accomplishments in worship acknowledges that God accompanies us on our journeys as individuals and a people.

Psalm 121 gives us phrase to carry us through life journeys, not just the times everything is going swimmingly, but also times when the journey is strenuous, or painful. It is one of the "Songs of Ascent" Or "Pilgrim Song" written for pilgrims traveling up, ascending, from the lowlands, the deserts and coastlands to higher Jerusalem, Mount Zion for one of the annual celebrations, like Passover. Then, much more so than now, travel was rife with danger, bringing anxiety and fear. This psalm reassures the traveler that God goes with them wherever they are. Imagine you are hiking, men, women, children, on a hot day, unsure if there are bandits along the way, or concerned about twisting an ankle, or getting stuck in the open during a thunderstorm.

A Pilgrim Song

I look up to the mountains;

does my strength come from mountains?

No, my strength comes from GOD,

who made heaven, and earth, and mountains.

God won't let you stumble,

your Guardian God won't fall asleep.

Not on your life! Israel's

Guardian will never doze or sleep.

GOD's your Guardian,

right at your side to protect you—

Shielding you from sunstroke,

sheltering you from moonstroke.

GOD guards you from every evil,

GOD guards your very life.

GOD guards you when you leave and when you return,

God guards you now, God guards you always!

On your journeys, road trips, or across the ocean, this summer, this could be your song of trust, assurance that you do not travel alone. God travels with you in your leaving and coming back- or in your “going out and coming in”.

Today we celebrate someone whom God has been accompanying through all her goings out and comings in for 100 years.

It's been quipped that an advantage of being 100 is one isn't subject to peer pressure. But it's increasing... In 2014, 72,000 in the US.

God has been Sylvia Kraai's helper, keeper and shade since May 27, 1917.

Just for context:

She was 1 when the great Influenza pandemic killed 20-40 million people

She was 3 when women got the vote

Seven when Prohibition began, 16 when it ended.

10 when Charles Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic

She was 12 when the Stock Market Crashed in 1929.

She was 24 when Pearl Harbor was bombed.

Sylvia was 44 when the first human went into space.

Sylvia is in her usual seat in the back row this morning accompanied by two of her three children. There are 11 grandchildren, 9 great grandchildren. For many years Sylvia was in Presbyterian Women, more recently she has been a volunteer “stuffer and folder” of our monthly Profiles newsletter. She lives independently, plays cards at least once a week at Evergreen and unless it’s icy, she drives.

We have a corsage and this applause for you.

Sylvia and her husband Leon who died 28 years ago were charter members of this congregation when it formed in 1958. At that time as

our first First Presbyterian Church members were coming and going out
of the Brooks Mansion

58 years later, there are there are 5 who remain:

Dolores Jacobusse, now residing at Resthaven

Lois Nienhuis, also at Resthaven

Al and Lois Kane (Lois is here with her daughter Sarah),

Dean Maris who joined with his parents (and)

And we have the children and relatives of charter members..

Peggy Vandenheuvel, Sandy VandenHeuvel

We thank God for you and those like you who founded this church, who
allowed yourselves to be led by the Spirit of God to do a new thing in
Holland in founding the First Presbyterian Church.

(Amen, we Praise your name O God)

If Sylvia and our charter members today represent the wisdom and
experience of older age, our children from preschool through 5th grade

represent those whose journey with God is fresh. Sunday mornings through the school year they come in to their own Worship Center where they learn stories of the faith, wonder about God's work in the world and with them, and learn the rudiments of worship, all appropriate for their age.

This morning we celebrate the leaders of those Worship Centers who we call "Celebrants". If any of the trainers or coordinators are here, would you stand? This congregation values you, needs you, honors you for the ministry you provide fulfilling on behalf of the congregation the baptismal promises we make to teach our children about God. There is a plant for you in the M and M café. Thank you for being part of these children's growing in God. (anyone here who was part of this program in your youth?)

Our spiritual growth does not stop when we are in the 5th grade; we also recognize this morning those who guide our middle and senior high youth as well as our adult classes. There are plants for you as well.

(Amen, We Praise your name O God)

At this time of the year we recognize and indeed celebrate our high school graduates representing those whose journey is young—17-18 years, experiencing perhaps their first “going out” from their home, their community for the first time.

Teresa Larson Youth Director has a few words to say about them.

(Amen, we Praise Your Name O God)

As we move now to one service for the summer months we say goodbye to the adult choir whom we hear at 11 o'clock service and the bell choir who will play our postlude for this service. Chuck, or Dr. Charles Norris as he is known by his Grand Valley Students, has been making music with the choir for 19 years. When you sing you pray twice... maybe

the same is true when you ring... Our worship is richer, deeper, more prayerful because of our music, piano, organ, voice, instruments. Choir—soprano, alto, tenor, bass, thank you—for sharing the gift of voice of time, of commitment with this congregation.

How long have you sung with the choir Bob Webber?

Who's the newest member?

There is always room for more voices..

There are plants or herbs for you as well--

We thank God that in our comings and goings into and out of worship that your voices, your ringing, your sound reminds us of the music of the spheres.

(Amen, We Praise your name O God)

Our last celebration is among the most difficult and emotional—this is a goodbye-saying celebration—we can use the word celebrate because we as a congregation have a spirit of gratitude to God and to you, Aaron Goodyke. But this is also a loss. And a grief. You aren't dying, this isn't a Memorial Service, but it feels a little bit like that nevertheless.

I've asked Chuck to say a few words.

(Give gift)

Aaron, Mary Oliver writes in her poem *In Blackwater Woods*:

To live in this world you must be able

to do three things:

to love what is mortal;

to hold it against your bones knowing

your own life depends on it;

and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go.

What time of life is it for you? What season are you in? Whether this is a season of saying hello or saying goodbye, God is with you in your going out and coming in from this time forth and forevermore. Even when accompanied by challenges, wounds, sadness, for which we rightfully mourn, that alone is enough cause for celebration.

(Amen, We Praise Your Name O God)