

**The Green Hill Presbyterian Church**  
**November 23, 2025 – Table Copy**

**SILENT PREPARATION:**

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever." Revelation 11:15

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION (*Unison*)**

We worship you with gladness, Great God, our Shepherd, for you have gathered us as your flock. You have sent a mighty Savior, who has demonstrated – over the centuries, and among us today – the power of love. Send your Spirit now, to remind us of your gifts, and to strengthen us for our tasks. May we show loyalty to Christ our King, by the way we live today – and every day. Amen.

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Almighty God, infinite in power and enthroned in glory,  
whose promise – of a Righteous Branch, and a Wise King –  
was fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Lord:  
Emmanuel – God with us –  
be with us once again as we read and hear your Holy Word,  
that the kingdom for which Jesus came – and gave himself –  
may surely come –  
both in us, and through us –  
as we open ourselves to your presence and purpose.  
We pray in his name and for his sake. Amen.

**FIRST SCRIPTURE READING**

Luke 23:33-43

*As we come to the end of Year C of our cycle of readings,  
our Gospel reading again comes from Luke.  
This morning's passage invites our attention to the fact that  
Jesus' kingship is not – yet – of this world.  
Rather, Jesus proves himself to be the King of Love, and self-less service....*

When they came to the place that is called The Skull,  
they crucified Jesus there with the criminals,  
one on his right and one on his left.  
Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them,  
for they do not know what they are doing."  
And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him,  
saying, "He saved others;  
let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God,  
his chosen one!"

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,  
and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."  
One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him,  
and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God,  
since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?  
"And we indeed have been condemned justly, for  
we are getting what we deserve for our deeds,  
but this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom."  
He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

## SECOND SCRIPTURE READING

Colossians 1:11-20

*The Letter to the Colossians addresses a community  
that is plagued by false teachers –  
who claim that people are governed  
by so-called "elemental spirits of the universe."  
These were thought to be cosmic powers hostile to God,  
and which stand as roadblocks –  
interrupting communion between God and humanity.  
Paul – then – writes to help the community understand the implications  
of Christ's kingship for his body, the Church.*

May you be made strong with all the strength –  
that comes from his glorious power,  
so that you may have all endurance and patience,  
joyfully giving thanks to the Father,  
who has enabled you to share in the inheritance  
of the saints in the light.

He has rescued us from the power of darkness,  
and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,  
in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,  
for – in him – all things in heaven and on earth were created,  
things visible and invisible,  
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers –  
all things have been created through him, and for him.

He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.  
He is the head of the body, the church;  
    he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,  
        so that he might come to have first place in everything.  
For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,  
    and – through him –  
        God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things,  
    whether on earth, or in heaven,  
        by making peace through the blood of his cross.

SERMON

“Thankful for the Right Reasons”

It is probably safe to say that *each one* of us  
    has a *different list of things* for which *we are thankful*.

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A **Sunday School teacher** once asked her class to *make such a list*,  
    and a **little boy** wrote down that he was *thankful for his glasses*.

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The **teacher** was impressed by that –  
    *some young people resent wearing glasses*.

And here – obviously –  
    was a *young man mature enough* to appreciate  
    what wearing glasses *did for him*.

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“**Johnny**” – she said –  
    “*I see that you put your glasses down at the head of the list  
    of things for which you are thankful.*”

*Is there any special reason?”*

Johnny answered,  
    “*Yes, ma’am. My glasses keep the boys from hitting me,  
    and the girls from kissing me.*”

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So, each person has their own list of the things for which they are thankful.

But most of us are mature enough in our faith  
    to recognize that **Thanksgiving** is a *somewhat dangerous holiday*.

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For example, when we give thanks for our good health,  
what does that say to people *who do not* have a well body?

Does that say that we are *more deserving* than they,  
or that – somehow – **God** loves us more?

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And, when we thank God for our nice homes – or our families –  
or our freedom as Americans,  
what does this say about good, decent, God-loving,  
people around the world who *do not share* these blessings?

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There are no ready answers for such questions.

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But the **Good News** is that we *can give thanks* –  
this **Thursday**, and all the rest of the year –  
for reasons *which are always right*.

So, *what are some of the things* that every **Christian** –  
regardless of his – or her – circumstances –  
in *any corner of the globe* –  
can be thankful for this season of **Thanksgiving**?

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Happily – In our reading from **Paul's letter** to the **Colossians** –  
we discover at least three *very appropriate suggestions*.

In it, **Paul** prays that the **Colossians** –  
and that we, as fellow believers –  
might  
“*Be made strong with all the strength  
that comes from his glorious power,  
and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience,  
while joyfully giving thanks to God the Father.....”*”

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So, **Paul** wanted us to *always joyfully give thanks* –  
but what are the *right things* that he had in mind –  
as reasons for thanksgiving?

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The first thing for which we should be thankful – according to St. Paul –  
is our inheritance.

Remember his words,

“...*giving thanks to God the Father who has enabled us  
to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light*”

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Here, Paul chose his words very carefully.

An inheritance is not an *award* for outstanding merit, is it?

An inheritance is not *pay* for a job well done.

Nor is it something one *earns* – or *deserves* – or *creates*  
by his – or her – own devotion.

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Rather, an **inheritance** is a *gift* –

a gift that is *made possible because of someone else's efforts*.

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You may receive a large inheritance –

but not because *you* are so smart or energetic,  
but because you *had a grandfather* who was.

Or – in some cases – you may have had a grandfather who *was never caught*.

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Wasn't it **Mark Twain** who said he spent a *large sum of money* –  
to trace his **family tree** –

and – then – spent *twice as much*  
trying to keep his **ancestry** a secret?

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A **little baby** can come into a **large inheritance** simply by the *accident of birth*.

Indeed, one of the consequences of the **New Birth in Christ Jesus**

is that we *automatically – immediately* – at that *very moment* –  
*become heirs of all that God has in store for his beloved children*.

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And that is a *staggering fact* that **many people** –

*especially people* who have been in the church *all their lives* –  
*have difficulty* accepting.

There is a **story** that *makes this reality painfully clear.*

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There was a **believer** who *had not been everything he ought to have been – and he knew it!*

In fact – when he finally passed from this life to the next one – he was *deeply concerned* that **St. Peter** *would not* let him through the **Pearly Gates**.

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But – when he got to **his destination** – he was *welcomed with open arms.*

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*“Are you certain that you didn’t make a mistake?”* he asked St. Peter.  
*“You see, there are certain parts of my life of which I’m sort of ashamed.”*

St Peter answered, *“No, we didn’t make a mistake. You see, we do not keep any records.”*

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And – as we might expect – the man was *greatly relieved and overjoyed.*

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Then, he saw a **group of men** over in a corner.

They were *beating heir heads* against a **celestial wall**,  
*clinching their fists,*  
and *stomping their feet* in disgust.

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*“What is the matter with them?”* the man asked St. Peter.

*“Oh”,* said St. Peter – with a grin.  
*“They also thought we had kept records.”*

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That *is not* to suggest that what we do is *unimportant.*

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But – at the *top of the list* of things for which we should be thankful – is the fact that *salvation is the free gift of God.*

It is *an inheritance* that is *bestowed upon us* –  
the *very moment* that we become **children of God**.

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In his book, Unconditional Love,  
Father John Powell tells about the time when he was serving  
as a chaplain in Germany.

A dear little sister – 87 years young – was *assigned to care* for his room.

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He says that every time he left the room – even for a moment –  
the good sister cleaned it.

She would *wax* the floors, *polish* the furniture, and so forth.

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On one occasion – when *he left the room* for a short walk –  
he came back to find her on her knees,  
putting a final sheen on her waxing job.

He laughingly teased her, “*Sister, you work too much.*”

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The dear, devoted little sister *straightened up* – though *still kneeling* –  
and looked at him with a *seriousness* – that bordered on *severity*.

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Then – she said firmly – “*Heaven isn't cheap, you know.*”

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Heaven certainly *is not* cheap – it cost **Jesus everything**.

Eternal life, however, *is* part of **our inheritance**.  
Jesus earned it...we simply *receive it by faith*.

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And *every believer can give thanks* for that this morning –  
*that is the first thing* for which our text tells us to be thankful.

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The second thing for which are to be thankful is the Incarnation.

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St. Paul writes,

“*He – that is, Jesus – is the image of the invisible God,  
the first born of all creation....*”

And – a little farther along – he writes,

“*He is the head of the body, the church;  
he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,  
so that he might come to have first place in everything.*”

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**Of whom is St. Paul speaking?**

Most certainly, he is speaking of the **Risen Christ**:  
without the **Incarnation** –  
without *God becoming flesh*,  
and *reconciling the world* unto himself –  
there *would be no inheritance*.

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Some of us may remember the work – among the **gorillas**, in **Africa** –  
of **California**-born, zoologist **Dian Fossey**.

**Dian** left the comforts of her home in **California** to live – for **18 years** –  
among those fierce creatures....to study them closely.

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It is hard to imagine that those mighty **gorillas**  
had become an **endangered species**,  
but – thanks to senseless slaughter by poachers – it was true.

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**Gradually the gorillas accepted her, and trusted her.**

And – from **1967** until **1985** – she carried on her work.

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But – in **1985** – **Dian Fossey** was *murdered*,  
still *seeking to protect the gorillas*,  
among whom she had *made her home*.

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It is certainly a long way from **California** to the jungles of **Africa**.

But it is *much farther still* from the *throne of God* to a *stable in Bethlehem*.

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Yet, *Jesus made that journey on our behalf*.

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As an *old hymn* testifies:  
*“Out of the ivory palaces, into a world of woe;  
only his great eternal love made my Savior go....”*

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When **Robert Louis Stevenson** retired to the **Samoa Islands** – for his health,  
he became a *kind and generous friend* to the natives of that island.

There was *only a rough path* leading from the harbor of his island to the interior,  
over which his new friends had to walk –  
in order to bring in necessary provisions.

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So – using his own money and personal effort –  
Stevenson had a good road constructed for his people.

And – in gratitude –  
the **Samoaans** called it, “*the road of a loving heart.*”

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The road **Jesus** walked to **Calvary** was also the *road of a loving heart*,  
was it not?

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As **Christians**, we believe the wonderful truth:  
that **God** *so loved the world* that he made that long walk –  
to come from *where he was*, to *where we are*.

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And so – while it was *impossible for us* to reach **God** –  
**God reached out to us**.

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**Paul** put it this way – in his letter to the **Romans**:  
“*But God proves his love for us in that –  
while we were still sinners –  
Christ died for us.*”

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**Christians may disagree on a number of things, and –  
to be sure – they do!**

**Christians** may be divided in terms of *theology*...,  
*how – and when – they baptize people*...,  
*who they invite* to gather around the **Lord’s table**...  
and even – if you can believe it –  
on the *political party* – with which they feel most comfortable.

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But there is one point on which we must all agree:  
God became flesh, and dwelt among us.

That is the **incarnation**, and – *without the incarnation* –  
there *can be no inheritance*.

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So, *that* is the *second thing* for which every **Christian** can give thanks:  
the **eternal God** *became one of us*.

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The fact is that there was no other way  
that **God** could have possibly revealed his loving nature to us.

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Suppose – instead – that **God** had chosen *one of us*,  
and *taken us* to be with him,  
and – then – *sent us back* to tell others.

*Do you think they would have listened?*

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Years ago – in *the American Magazine* –  
**Merle Crowell** told a *true story* from **Alaska**.

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It was about an **Eskimo** from **Greenland**,  
who was taken on one of the **American North Polar** expeditions.

And later – as a *reward for his faithfulness* –  
he was brought to **New York City** for a short visit.

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He was amazed at the sights – and – sounds he experienced there.

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So – *when he returned* to his native village – he told stories:  
of *buildings* that rose into the *very face* of the sky;  
of *streetcars*, which he described as *houses that moved* along the trail,  
with *people living in them* as they moved;  
of mammoth *bridges*,  
*artificial lights*,  
and *all the other dazzling aspects* of being in a large metropolis.

His own people looked at him coldly – they did not believe him.

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Indeed, they *gave him a new name* –  
the name was **Sagdluk**, which means **The Liar**.

And, he *kept that name* all the rest of his days –  
until his *old name* was *entirely forgotten*.

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Similarly, there was no other way **God** could have done it;  
it was essential that the **God** of all creation  
take upon himself the *flesh – and frailty – of humanity*.

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We are thankful – then – for our inheritance,  
and for the incarnation – that makes it possible.

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Finally, we are thankful for our inclusion in the family of God.

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*“Through [Christ] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things...,”*  
Paul has written,  
*“making peace by the blood of his cross.”*

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In his book Lead on (Waco: Word Books 1986),  
**John Haggai** tells about **Dr. Claude H. Barlow** –  
a missionary to **China** –  
and one of the *most-revered foreigners* to work in that land.

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A *strange disease* – for which **Dr. Barlow** knew *no remedy* – was killing people.

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There was no research laboratory for this disease,  
so **Dr. Barlow** conducted his own research.

He *studied* the disease,  
*filling a notebook* with his observations.

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He then procured a vial of *deadly disease germs*,  
and sailed for the **United States**.

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But – *before he arrived* – he took the germs into his own body;  
then, he went to **John Hopkins University Hospital**, to be observed.

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**Claude Barlow** soon *became very sick*,  
and he allowed his old professors at **John Hopkins**  
to *use him* as a **human guinea pig**.

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Fortunately, a cure was – then – found,  
which a now-healthy **Claude Barlow** took back to **China** with him.

And, *his heroic efforts saved countless lives*.

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Later – *when asked* about the experience – **Dr. Barlow** replied,  
“Anyone would have done the same thing.  
*I happened to be in the position of vantage,*  
*and had the chance to offer my body.”*”

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**Do you think that just anyone would have done that?**

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I suspect that *only* a person with a *very special kind of love* –  
in his or her heart –  
would make *that kind* of sacrifice.

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Indeed, is *that* very special kind of love – proceeding from the heart of **God** –  
that *holds this world together*.

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And that kind of love still exists –  
it exists in *this church*,  
and among people *around the world* –  
who have *had a personal encounter* with **Jesus Christ**.

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**The fact is that all of our blessings are gifts from God,**  
**for which God deserves our thanks.**

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But – even as we *enjoy all the blessings* that **God** has bestowed upon us –  
let’s focus *our thanksgiving* on the *right reasons*:

Let's give thanks for our inheritance as *children of God*,  
for the incarnation that makes our inheritance *possible*,  
and for our inclusion in the family of God.

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And let's not forget that *that inclusion* was made possible by the **One**  
who took *creation's longest walk* –  
from the **Throne of Heaven** to a stable in **Bethlehem...**  
then, from his home in **Nazareth** to a lonely cross –  
on a desolate hill – called **Calvary**.

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Friends, because of what **God** *has done for us* in **Jesus Christ** –  
whose eternal **Kingship** we *celebrate this day* –  
we can truly say,  
regardless of our circumstances, or our situations:

**Thanks be to God! Amen.**

*Dix*

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**AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (Unison)**      Adapted from the Shorter Catechism(1647)

One: What offices does Christ execute as our Redeemer?

All: **Christ, as our Redeemer, executes the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king. He executes the office of a prophet in revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.**

**He executes the office of a priest in his offering up of himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and to reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.**

**He executes the office of a king in calling out of the world a people to himself; and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which he governs them; in bestowing saving grace upon his elect, preserving and supporting them under all temptations and sufferings; restraining and overcoming all their enemies, and powerfully ordering all things for his own glory, and their good.**

### **CHARGE AND BENEDICTION**

Our inheritance of salvation – as the gracious, free gift of God,  
the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ – which made our salvation possible,  
and our amazing inclusion in the family of God –  
these are – most certainly – “right reasons” for our thanksgiving!  
So, may we show our thanks, both in word and in deed,  
today – and everyday that God blesses us to live....

Let us receive the Lord's benediction....

