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SPEAKER

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Celebration Sunday

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TITLE

Marvelously Helped

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 146



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So turn with me in your Bible to Psalm 146. If you are a guest, we're glad you're here. And Psalm 146 is going to help us to fix our eyes upon the one who's worthy of all praise. It's important for us to recognize this, that it is Christ who saved us. And as a church family, it's Christ who took our lives and merged them together and connected us and has sought to grow us. And he serves us and he has sent us with the gospel to the world. It is Christ who kept us unified during a year of medical, political, racial, social unrest. It is Christ who healed people's lives and our church family. And it is Christ who comforted those who are grieving the death of a loved one.

It is Christ who sustained our teachers, our parents who became teachers, our first responders and health-care workers. It's Christ within our church family, who is granted strength, endurance. And for many, when our church family relief from the perpetual binding strain of anxiety, fear, depression and chronic pain. It is Christ who motivated every act of obedience, every act of generosity. It's Christ who blessed us in order that we might be able to be a blessing, not only to our own community, but to our state, to our Nation and around the world. It is Christ who drew over 800 people over the last year to come as a first time visitor to come into this room in order to hear about Christ, to hear the gospel and to worship him.

It's Christ who opened up people's hearts, who quicken their conscience, who open their spiritual eyes and gave them the gift of faith and allowed us to rejoice with so many people who indicated that they had just trusted Christ. It is Christ who is worthy of all praise. In Psalm 146 says, "Praise the Lord. Praise The Lord oh my soul. I will praise the Lord as long as I live, I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man in whom there is no salvation.

When his breath departs, he returns to the earth and on that very day, his plans perish. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous, the Lord watches over the sojourners. He upholds the widow and the fatherless. The way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign forever. Your God O Zion to all generations." Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Verse five tells us, "Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob." Sometimes when I even this week have thought about like, what should the title be, the idea of being helped? And it sounds like most of the effort is still ours. Doesn't it? Like we're doing all this work and God is behind us. And he's got his finger on our back and he's helping us along. But the only reason I use the word is because he uses the word. That in his mercy and his kindness, when he describes the fact that every impulse in your heart that's ever been good has come from him, he describes that as help.

Every time you've ever done something that is loving or merciful, every act of faith, it's all motivated by his spirit within our hearts and yet he says, "This is what it means to be helped by me." We, as a church family and as individuals have been helped, marvelously helped. And every year what we seek to do is to set aside one particular day. It happens to be today and simply celebrate some of the ways that God has helped us. I know that motives are difficult to discern. And therefore people have gotten the wrong idea sometimes from year to year about what this day is about.

Is this scoreboard Sunday? Is this pat yourself on the back Sunday? Is this put your head in the sand and ignore the reality of all the pain in the world Sunday? And the answer to each of those is no. You see, there's a passage that we looked at last year, Luke chapter 17. It says there that there was 10 lepers. People with such problems with their skin that they had to be isolated from community. They couldn't be around people except other lepers. And they meet Jesus on the road and he sends them to the temple and on the way he heals them. And it says in one of the 10 came back to give thanks. Jesus comes to that one who came to give him thanks and he says, "We're not all 10 healed. Where are the nine?" You say, "What's the motive of celebration Sunday?" We don't want to be the nine.

All right. We have not found any secret source of Providence. We're not better than any other church. We're just helped. We've been helped, marvelously helped. And so it's fitting for us to want to be like the one that says, "God, I don't know why? It's all grace. It's not because we're more, it's not because we're better, it's not because we're wiser. It's not because we have better leaders. It's because you have helped us and we come back and we want to say, thank you. Psalm 9:1. Dave read it earlier. He says, "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart." And then he tells us how he's going to fortify his Thanksgiving. He says, "I will recount," literally I will count again. I will remember again, all of your wonderful deeds. What this means is this, is if it ever comes to a place in your life to where someone says, "Hey, what are you thankful for?"

And you cannot think of something, it's because you need to do some recounting, to look back in your past, look back in your week or your day and to say, "God, what have you done in my life? What have you done in my life that it's undeserved, that's kind, that just proves that you're near, that you love and that you love me. The reason that we count is to give thanks. And what's interesting is this day, every year, it's fascinating. Every day, this day falls on the wrong day. If we did it and planned it next week, it would fall on the wrong day. There was last week it'd fall on the wrong day.

And this is a really important thing. What I want to actually do this morning is, and what celebration Sunday really is, is it's to train you as individuals and families in the discipline of celebration. You've heard of the discipline of prayer and Bible study, where you do things even when though it may not feel like the easiest thing to do in the moment, but then there's benefit. Well, there's the discipline of celebration that the Bible describes and what Psalm 146 actually describes as well. But because every single year, it falls on a day, what it can feel like from time to time is that we as a church, ignore all the needs. And just like this guy, we put our head in the sand and we say, Hey, let's celebrate. Let's get balloons.

Some of you walked in, you said Afghanistan and you got balloons. It is true. The Psalmist is teaching the discipline of celebration, but I want you to see that he's doing it in the midst of tremendous difficulty. You say, I don't see difficulty. We'll look a little deeper. Look at verses seven through nine. The Lord is doing things to oppress people in prison people, hungry people, blind people, people who were bowed down, people who have lost their homes, exiles, refugees, sojourners, people who have buried their husband and wife, mom and dad, people who are surrounded by wickedness. You see, this is not close your eyes Sunday.

The discipline of celebration is not to ignore the day, it's to acknowledge God in the day. And it's something that we need to do as a church family. It's a discipline, but it's also a discipline you need to do yourself. Though even when you don't feel like it, it's important to pray. And even when you don't feel like it's important to recount so that you can give thanks. But before we do that, before we dive into the text, it really is important to acknowledge the day. And that's what we want to do right now. We want to acknowledge some of the things that are on our hearts, and then we want to pray. And I want to give you time to pray. I know and you know, we came in and this world, it's really... Well, it's just a heartache. And you all know that and there's things you walked in and you're like, man, think about what's going on in the world. Afghanistan is happening. Haiti is happening. Floods in our own state are happening.

There's all kinds of tragedies that are happening all over the world that you just haven't seen or heard. There's tragedies everywhere. There's oppression everywhere. There's loss and death everywhere. There's political unrest around us. This week, we sent out a letter about mask and COVID. COVID is everywhere. And all this causes strain and angst. My inbox and phone always bear witness to it. I recognize that this is broken. I know I can't give you all the things that you need right now in terms of why we do what we do. I try to right as clearly as I possibly can when I right you. I encourage those of you who want to wear a mask to wear it.

And for every single person in the room, what we want to do is simply give you the ability to make the choice to discern that one of the things that the Bible forces you to do, if you have an open eye to the Bible is you must think of other people when you're considering your own discernment. It is not just freedom for yourself. It's also freedom for others. So we should consider these things. The fact is that some people read that letter and some people hearing what I'm saying now.

And some people are looking at the news and looking at all these other things and think, I just wish I had an opportunity right now to talk to that guy so that he could advocate for the thing that is most pressing in my life. And so instead of talking to me, why don't we all just take a few moments before we talk about the discipline of celebration and let's talk to the one who can actually do something about it. So let me give you a moment right now, where you're at. And what I want to ask you to do is to pray.

The world is broken. Just simply take one part of its brokenness, whatever it is that you wish I would talk about right now and talk to the creator of the universe, the sustainer of all things and the one who can reform our hearts. So let's pray. Father in heaven I just acknowledge again, that your patience is remarkable. Your

patience with us, your patience, with the world, your patience seems to be only outpaced by your love for us, for people. We confess to you that we don't see even a fraction of what you see and our heart isn't even capable of breaking and being grieved over what we even do see to the capacity that yours does. And yet you see it all. You feel it all and you are the victim of every sin. You carry the heartache of every person who feels heartache. And so we call upon you, our maker and we recognized that apart from you, we can do nothing. Apart from you, we would have seen no good things.

And we confess to you that when we look into the world and we see its brokenness, the first thing that we have to do is to confess that we've contributed to it. Our own sin and pride and lust and greed and unbelief and deceit, our own irritability and impatience have contributed to so much of the chaos. And so we ask that you would forgive us and we ask that you would heal us and now we ask you would heal our world. We ask he would heal our city, our state, our country. We ask God for those who've never heard the gospel that they would be able to hear. We pray for those in Afghanistan.

You would protect Haiti, even in our own state, other places where there's tragedies and disasters that are happening. We're so much loss of life and property and freedom. So much loss of peace is being experienced all over the world. We simply ask God for your grace. We pray father, for those in our church family who are oppressed, we pray for those who are poor. We pray for those who are hungry. We pray for those who are refugees. We pray father. We pray for those who are orphaned. We pray for those who are widows. We pray for those who are blind. We pray for those who are hungry.

We ask God for your grace in their lives, for those who are battling COVID or family members who have COVID. We ask God, that you would give them grace, you would heal. We ask that you would help us to be marked by love in all that we do, all that we say and all that we think. And so God, on this day, when we pause to say, we thank you, God I thank you that we get to say, thank you. Not in a vacuum of reality, but our thank you is pressing us to a greater reality. And that is that you really are the king. You really are the Lord. And so would you capture our hearts again this morning? And would you teach us through these words in Psalm 146 how to celebrate in the midst of a storm. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So what do you do? Where we read Psalm 146 and now this is what I believe the Psalmist tells us to do. First, this is not only for us today, but for you individually and your families, when you need to celebrate, even in brokenness, what do you do? First, he tells us to point your praise to the Lord, to point your praise to the Lord. See, he knows that we're like a faucet that's stuck in the on position. He knows that God made us in such a way that it's like the gears are stripped and praise or that water is flowing out of that faucet. And you are like that faucet and your mouth, those words are just gushing forth praise. It always happens.

You see anytime that our heart is stirred by something that is talented, by something that's beautiful by something that's creative, something that's smart or that somebody that's smart, talented, virtuous, courageous acts of valor. When we see something that's tasty versus something that's not tasty. It's amazing what happens.

Anything that stirs this heart motivates the mouth to say, that's good. I liked that. And so we spend our whole life saying good and bad and good and bad. I like that. I don't like that. We praise. Praise means to boast in. It means to adore or to admire something.

It's to say, this is special, this is important, this is good. He knows that we do that. The question is not if we are going to praise as a people this week. The question is what and who we will praise this week. And the Psalmist is seeing that the Lord is moved in good ways and kind ways and his soul is stirred. And so what does he do? He starts in verse one and he commands us to praise. He says, praise the Lord. He's speaking out. Praise the Lord literally means hallelujah. Hallelu means praise. Jah for Yahweh is the Lord. And so this Psalm begins and ends with that word, hallelujah. Praise the Lord. He's telling us to praise.

He says, you need to praise. He says, you need to praise. You may not feel like it, but you need to praise and you need to praise too. And then what he does is he immediately switches gears almost instantaneously. And he begins talking to himself and he begins saying, I need to praise. He grabs his own soul. He lifts it up and he says, you, soul. You need to begin praising the Lord. And then third, what he does in verse two is he says and not only am I going to praise, not only should I praise, he then declares his intentions to continue to praise. Not only in his words, but also in his words that are put to music in his singing.

He says, "I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God while I have my being." Now, this is so important. Just like every other spiritual discipline, whether it's reading your Bible, whether it's fellowship with other believers, holding each other accountable, whether it's prayer. We praise even during difficulty because of the worth of Christ, but also because of the hidden benefits that Christ is planted within the discipline, within the field of obedience. In other words for many of us, we know that there are some times when we simply don't want to pray.

And yet there's things that are in our mind and we think, you know what? I need to pray. And so I'm going to pray and there are times, isn't it true that the discipline of engaging and reading your Bible, when your heart says, I would rather look at something else, but I'm going to prioritize this. And then suddenly you find that Christ has planted all kinds of benefits in whatever that discipline was. And now it's enjoyed by those who have participated. This is exactly what he's saying to us. Is there is benefits for us that are planted in the field of obedience.

You remember in Acts 16 Paul and Silas they're in prison after they're literally beat up. They're put into the stocks, their legs are cramping. And one of them starts saying, "You know what? Isn't it amazing here we are. And yet isn't amazing just how patient God is to us?" And suddenly one of them start singing and the other starts singing. And all of a sudden they're in prison, they're singing. Is that some temporary interlude from reality? No. It's recognizing that God is there with them in his reality. And it says in that midst, it says, "And the prisoners were listening."

They listen when we praise and when we do not praise. And so let me encourage us with this. Is let's fortify our praise by pleading for a fresh vision of Christ. Now you write that down and then let me explain it because it is a real possibility that you're going to go in the wrong direction. It's real possible. When I say a fresh vision of Christ, you may think in your mind, I need to close the Bible and I need to read someone else's writings about the Bible, or maybe there's some other holy book or some other place that can give me another vision of Jesus Christ. What I mean by this is this is that when I say fortify, our praise, this is why it's so important. If your heart is not stirred by the reality of Christ, then the faucet of your mouth is not going to erupt with praise.

In other words, the reason that some of us didn't sing earlier, didn't feel like singing earlier or didn't enjoy singing earlier is because we did not see Christ. We saw words on a screen. Words are boring. Screens are screens. They do not cause eruptive worship. So we have to see him as he is in order for our heart to be unleashed so that our mouth can begin to gush praise. So how do you do that? You open the Bible. When I say a fresh vision, I'm talking about Moses. When after seeing all these remarkable miracles and splendor and glory and power, he comes to the Lord again. He says, "I just want to see your glory."

I'm talking about Paul, after he's seen all these miraculous things that God has done in his own life, he says, "I just want to know Christ. Yes, I know him, but I want to know him. I want to know the power of his resurrection and how it can change the way that I even talk to my friends. I want to know him. What you find is this. Is when you come to the scriptures on your own and you begin reading them and you show up on look out, not for something you're supposed to do, but you show up looking to admire the son of God, open up God, I want to see Christ.

Help me to see Christ in these words, help me to just have such admiration for who I see in the person of Christ, that it stirs my heart to want to praise. Friends listen, if you do not love singing, you need to begin seeing him. And so let me encourage you is that you're going to praise something this week. Let me just make sure to remind you to put it on the right day. The best thing, the sovereign one, the creative one, the healing one, the patient gracious kind one. You point your praise the Lord. Second thing he says, put your trust in the Lord. You put your trust in the Lord. In this broken, terrifying world, everybody is looking for a hero to save the day. We typically look at our heroes as the influential people who have authority, who have power.

So we typically look to politicians and we look to rulers and leaders. And we look to people who have these kinds of influences in our life. But notice what he says. In the midst of talking to us about how do you celebrate during the storm. What does he say? He says, do not put your trust in princes. In a son of man, meaning we are sons, daughters of a man, humans, mortal people. "In whom there's no salvation, when his breath, departs he returns to the earth. And on that very day, his plans perish. You see influential mortals. I'm talking about the kind of influential mortals that when they die, they get to rest in state within the Capitol building like this picture. You look at this picture and you look at people and you go, those people can make a difference. They have the power. And what he says here is this, is they can't save.

When they're alive, they have to sleep every day. And then they die and when they die, their successor changes all their plans and so those plans perish. The discipline of celebration is the act of laying our trust on the right set of shoulders. In other words, if you need peace in this terrifying world, if you need truth in this deceitful world, if you need spiritual renewal within this morally corrupt world, if you need and long for cultural reformation within this morally broken world, put not your trust in mortal man. Peter taught us all flesh is like grass. He's seen a piece of grass as with the Bible says, you're like that grass. You go back, some grass gets really pretty. It does and Peter recognizes that. He says, you know what? Not only grass. He says in all its glory, meaning that when we find someone that can jump four feet off the ground, we're like, wow, that's spectacular.

And then they fall back down. We pay him billions now jump four feet off the ground to go back to the earth. He says, look, their glory is like grass that has a flower. It's like normal people and they're just grass. Then you got these special people. They're like the grass that does a little flower. And He says, you know what's going to happen? All the grass and all the flowers, it's going to fall, wither and die. Put not your trust in mortal man. Oh, what a timely truth for a growing mostly unified debt-free church on Glenwood Avenue on a day called Celebration Sunday. Put not your trust in mortal man.

The best of men and women are men and women at best. And this is why God looks at us and he says in Jeremiah 9, "He says, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man boast in his mind. Let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him move post boasting this that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord. Where's your trust today? Where's your trust for your family? Where's your trust for your soul? Where's your trust for this country? Is it a color? Put not your trust in mortal man? And let me urge us as a church family then. If this is all true, then let's put our full weight of trust on Christ. When you sat down in that chair, you plot down in that chair multiple times. You have faith in that chair.

And you know the strength of your faith is not what keeps you off the ground right now. It's the strength of that chair. If that chair is compromised, it doesn't matter how much faith you have in it. It's not going to keep you up. And so it is with the savior. The strength of your faith is not what saves you is the strength of the savior that you've placed your faith over then. It is Jesus Christ who came to this earth, who died on a cross, was buried in a grave and he rose from the dead. He accomplished what you and I cannot accomplish in order to remove our sin from us. But we must trust in him. Trust literally means put your full weight upon him. In other words, you can't say, you know what? One part Jesus, one part my own works.

It's not trust. Trust says, I'm going to put all of my weight, my full trust upon him and you could do that today. If you've never trusted him and for those of you who have, keep trusting. Did you know that the hope of your marriage is ultimately not in mortal man? The hope of your kids coming home after a long season of rebellion is not mortal man. The hope of this church, the hope of our state, the hope of COVID, the hope of this country, it is not mortal man. Put your trust in him. The third thing he says to do is to rest your hope then in the Lord. This discipline is celebration. It involves two other things and they're put together. And what it

does is it produces hope. It involves the recounting of things that God has done in past and in remembering that he is an eternal God who reigns forever. And what that means is when you see what God who will be here tomorrow is done yesterday, it gives us hope for today and tomorrow.

What he's done, he can do again, which is why in verse five, he says, blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob whose hope is in the Lord, his God. And then what he does from verses six through nine if you notice, like he just starts enlisting things that he's seen God do in people's lives in the past. He made the heaven and the earth. He keeps faith forever. That means his promise is his word. He makes a promise. He makes good on that promise. Executes justice for the oppressed. He's looked at people who are in their humble state. They looked up to God and said, I need help. There's no one to help. And suddenly he looks down and he goes, that person has been helped. The Lord God almighty has pointed his love and in his care has concerned upon that individual. And they've been helped. They've received justice. He gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free.

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind, physical as well as so many times, spiritual. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous, the Lord watches over the sojourners. People, these are exiles. These are refugees. People if they stay home, they get killed at home. And so they run looking for another home. He says, he upholds the widow and the fatherless, people who have buried a spouse or a parent. They come and God comes and he says, I'm going to uphold you. He says none of that but I see wickedness in the world. And I see within wickedness, there's this consequence.

And it is the Lord who brings wickedness and those who are wicked to ruin. He recognizes all this, but then notice what he does. In verse 10 he says, but that's not all. I can't only look back. I also must look at who it is that we're talking about. And he happens to be the one that's going to reign forever to all generations. And what this does, is it propels a new spirit of hope within us to say, if he's done it before he can do it again. And this is the ultimate hope for you and for me, some of us Christ has saved wayward sons and daughters. He can save your son, your daughter. Christ has healed the sick. He can heal your husband, your wife, your parent.

He has mended broken hearts and he can mend your heart. He's comforted people who are grieving the death of a loved one, and he can comfort your heart. He has reconciled broken marriages and relationships and he can reconcile yours. Psalm 111 says, "Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them," and this is how we want to end our time before we sing. I gave you time at the beginning to recognize and to pray to the Lord about some of the broken things that we see. What I want to do now is give you an opportunity of silence just to pray to the Lord. And you can think about one or two things that he's done in your life personally, or maybe your family, or maybe you think about what he's done to this church family.

But let me encourage you to do two things right now. Let me encourage you to take a few moments to recount his kindness, his grace to you. Whatever it is, the ways that he's done that. And then to express your hope in him, that what he has done before he could do again. So let's take a moment now and let's pray. Father, we

thank you that you have been kind to us. You have helped us in a marvelous way. The Bible, your word tells us that the wages of sin is death. And yet here we are still alive. Your mercy to give us time to repent and then your continued blessings in our life when we do, it's all just grace, it's all mercy. We recognize that all that grace and all that mercy comes from you. So for every act of kindness, every blessing, every word of encouragement, every protection provision that we have not even been able to see, we just say thank you.

We thank you that you've been good to us. And because you have been good to us and because you're the eternal righteous God, we believe that what you have done you can do again. And that gives us hope. We're thankful for that hope. So we pray now God, as we sing to you, that you would fill our hearts, not just a picture of a screen, but you would help us to see your kindness and love portrayed most vividly on the cross, is the motivation to pour out praise. We love you and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.



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