

SERMON TITLE: "Give Thanks for Jesus"
SERMON TEXT: Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: November 6, 2022, at Ogden FUMC

INTRODUCTION

As I begin this sermon, I want to say "Thank you!" to those of you who have participated in our church's ministries in this past week. One of the things we did was volunteer at the Western Jurisdictional Conference, which was held at Christ UMC in Salt Lake City. I know Austin Barron volunteered some time there yesterday. On Friday, David Barron, Karen Lee, Tim Conrad, and Jennie Sambamurthi went to staff the refreshment table and keep the coffee pots and water jugs full. Thanks to all of you who brought cookies, fruit, and other snacks for that. The delegates and observers were very appreciative of the quantity and variety of refreshments that we had available. Your contributions helped keep them alert and functioning through long hours of important decision-making, as they voted ballot after ballot until three new bishops were elected.

I'm also grateful to Steven Loy, Marty Smith, Paul Kriekard, Ray Christian, and the other volunteers who organized and assisted in yesterday's Veterans Tribute Run. The proceeds from that 5K fundraiser and the Mission Emphasis donations that many of you have made will go to the Residents Activities Fund at the George E. Wahlen Ogden Veterans Home. Those men and women who have served our country will now enjoy some fun activities, thanks to all of you.

I also want to say "thank you" to those of you who have cared for our new Cuban immigrant friends Yanier and Yusimi. Our congregation provided them shelter for a week and a half, so they had time to find a little studio apartment. You have also helped with transportation and other supplies. Our congregation's assistance has been a miracle to Yanier and Yusimi, for which they are very grateful.

Here at First UMC, where we have many people doing many good things, there are always many reasons to be thankful. And that's good, right? Gratitude is one of the basic ways we express our

Christian faith. So, during this month of November, we are going to focus our attention on this subject. Today, to get us started, I'd like us to consider our scripture reading from Hebrews and find some reasons that we can give thanks for Jesus.

1—JESUS CAN SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES

A first reason we can give thanks to God for Jesus is that Jesus can “sympathize with our weaknesses.” We find this in Hebrews 4:15, where the writer describes Jesus like a high priest who has been tested in every way as we are. In the verses that follow, the writer compares Jesus to a high priest who “is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward” because “he himself is subject to weakness.”

What we hear in these verses is that Jesus understands us. He gets where we're coming from. He can relate. He feels our pain. He knows intuitively and instinctively, as well as academically. Having been born as a human being, Jesus experienced the same things we have experienced. That would include many good things, of course—like love, hope, generosity, forgiveness, accomplishment, and peace. But his humanity would also have included sickness, pain, exhaustion, sadness, grief, anger, disappointment, conflict, embarrassment, temptation, frustration, and mortality.

Sometimes we get so focused on Jesus being God's divine Son that we forget that he really was human also. I don't mean part human or sort-of human. I'll grant you that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery. But our Christian belief that Jesus was both divine and fully human means then that he was also limited, forgetful, distracted, and needy like we are. From the Gospel stories, we know that sometimes Jesus failed to live up to what other people wanted from him. We know that Jesus gained and lost friends and followers. And we know that he questioned some of the religious beliefs of his day. Since Jesus was really human—and not just pretend human—we can also surmise that he had to get some kind of education, figure out how to earn a living, and maybe even negotiate some relationship challenges along the way. Apparently, those human characteristics weren't significant handicaps to

Jesus, though. Instead, Jesus' human experiences were a resource to help him understand our human struggles, biases, and limitations.

Of course, we can thank God for the divine aspects of Jesus the Christ, who co-existed with God, since before the time of creation. But we should also thank God for the very human Jesus who can sympathize with our weaknesses.

2—JESUS LEARNED OBEDIENCE THROUGH WHAT HE SUFFERED

A second reason we can give thanks to God for Jesus is that Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered. We see this in Hebrews 5:8. Jesus wasn't the Son of God just because he suffered human indignities and stresses. Otherwise, every human being who ever lived would qualify for the job of Messiah and Lord. Jesus was unique because—while he lived his very human life—he “offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him,” and Jesus “was heard because of his reverent submission.” In other words, Jesus was willing to be reshaped and transformed. He was willing to learn, submit, and grow according to God's will for his life.

As Christians, it's easy for us to assume that Jesus was perfect in every way from his conception onward—or, better yet, from his divine pre-existence onward. But, to be human, Jesus had to have been a kid. He had to go through the terrible twos and teenage rebellion. How else could he have grown up as an independent and capable human being? Think about the story of Jesus when he was 12 years old and went to Jerusalem with his family for the Passover celebration. His parents and the rest of his extended family were most of the way back home before they realized Jesus was missing from their group. They had to go all the way back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days, they finally found Jesus in the temple, with the religious leaders.

That's good, right? Yes, sure, except that young Jesus had made his parents sick with worry. Mother Mary even scolded Jesus for treating them badly. I think every person who has ever lived with a teenager can recognize at least the possibility of a snarky, condescending tone in Jesus' response: “Why

were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Even if Jesus were absolutely innocent in that episode, the 12-year old certainly had some learning and growing yet to do. And that's precisely what the Gospel of Luke tells us: that Jesus went home with his parents and was obedient to them, and that he "increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor" (Lk 2:41-52).

Like the rest of us humans, Jesus was a student in the school of hard knocks. And, apparently, Jesus was smart enough or sensitive enough to learn from that suffering. He didn't persist in stubborn willfulness. He didn't use his special abilities to abuse other people. Jesus wasn't sinless because he never, ever made a mistake. Jesus was sinless because, when he made mistakes, he learned and grew from them. He was open and willing to submit to God's perfecting and transforming power. That gives the rest of us some hope for ourselves that we too can be improved. And, so, we thank God that Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered.

3—JESUS BECAME THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION

A third reason we can give thanks for Jesus is found in Hebrews 5:9. There we see that Jesus "became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." Fortunately, most of us aren't thinking about death too much. But whenever we do ponder what happens beyond this life, it's a blessed comfort to believe that God has some good things in store for us. For those of us who are interested in Jesus, for those of us who want to follow his example of obedience and mercy, there's no need for doubts about what will become of us. We can find spiritual peace in this promise of eternal salvation.

Sure, there will still be plenty of challenges and troubles in this life. We will still have to deal with temptations and continue moving on to perfection in our Christian faith. We will still have worries about finances, health, and family relationships. As a people, we still have to vote to keep our government functioning, and we will still need to solve the problems of global climate change. Yes, those kinds of human concerns will continue.

But, at least we don't have to worry about what will become of us after this life on earth is over. When we follow the example of Jesus and rely on his grace, we can be confident that we will enjoy eternity with God. It's like the hymn says: "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine! . . . angels descending bring from above, echoes of mercy, whispers of love." I hope you, like me, can join in singing the refrain of that song: "This is *my* story, this is *my* song, praising *my* Savior all the day long." And, for our theme of gratitude this month, we can change it slightly and sing, "This is my story, this is my song, *thanking* my Savior all the day long." For the assurance of salvation in this life and for eternity, we give thanks for Jesus.

CONCLUSION

In a few minutes, after the choir sings, we will participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Communion liturgy that we recite is called "The Great Thanksgiving." It's a prayer of thanks to God for the saving acts of Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection. As we speak this prayer and receive the bread and juice of Christ's blessing, I hope that we will feel gratitude that Jesus can sympathize with our weaknesses, that he learned obedience through what he suffered, and that he is our source of eternal salvation. Today and forever, let us give thanks for Jesus.