SERMON
St. Peter's UCC
October 19, 2025
(Harvest Home Sunday)
"Pay God a Compliment"

Scripture:
Exodus 16:11-15 Manna from Heaven
Psalm 1
John 6:25-35 The Bread from Heaven

God is truly a bountiful God. That truth is echoed in a statement by a saint who lived in the 16th century, named Teresa of Avila, who also was honored with the title of Doctor of the Church. She once said the following phrase that I like. She said, "You pay God a compliment by asking great things of Him." We are to see God as a bountiful God, and respond by asking great things of God.

And we do ask great things of God. You may think to yourself, "Oh, well, I'm not about to ask God for a million bucks, so when did I ask great things of God?"

We ask great things when we say the Lord's Prayer. "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." We are asking for

nothing less than heaven on earth when we say the Lord's Prayer. Basically, we are praying that the gap between heaven and earth will be no more.

"When did I pray for great things," you might ask. Well, when we believe and look to God, even expect of God, that we will be blessed with the Resurrection promise; that we will be received in heaven for all eternity to know in full the peace, the joy, the majesty, beauty, and love of heaven for all time, then we certainly are asking great things.

When we pray for God's grace in our lives, God's help, with the expectation that God is with us, that we are not alone, we are asking great things. When we turn to God in prayer in the name of God's Church in the world, trusting that God will be with us, that God will help the Church to love and serve others, to seek justice and peace and resist evil, when we ask God to be with us in life, in death, in life beyond death, we ask great things.

That is what our faith life is about; that is what we are about as God's Church – great things - because we trust that God is a bountiful God.

It's true that our world still knows valleys of the shadow of death. It's all too true that fear and hatred, even violence, are easy to find in our world, but that is all the more reason to turn to God and ask great things, for we are in great need of God in our lives and in the world.

Because God is a bountiful God, we should always be on the lookout for ways that we limit God's vision for what is possible and what is desired, for what God would have us be together on this tiny planet. We should compliment God by asking great things of God.

We speak of hope in God's vision for us, but there is definitely room for a larger hope in our faith and in the world. We speak often in our faith of following in the ways and the Spirit of Christ, but a larger hope reminds us that we are speaking of nothing less than transformation; for hearts embued with heaven's grace; bathed in a heavenly light. And transformation for a bountiful God extends beyond individuals to the whole world.

As Christians, our bountiful God calls on us to expand our vision and our faith to a full restoration of our covenant with God, in which God will

make all things new, and God will be all in all. God is a bountiful God, worthy of a larger hope. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, chapter 4, that he is "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." Can our God of mercy make happen what God desires for us? Of course.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus says, "the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." When the crowd asks for this bread, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." From God's own being, a Savior came to us, because God was not willing to withhold any hope or any grace. This is truly a God of bounty.

As much as we rejoice in the fall harvest and visions of cornucopias filled to overflowing with the harvest, even more so does God offer a cup overflowing, so that we may ask great things, with the assurance that "goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

And how does a Christian respond to God's bounty? With gratitude, of course, but not just gratitude for ourselves, because God asks great things of us, too. Asking great things goes both ways. Just as we compliment God by asking great things of God, so God compliments us by asking great things of us. We show gratitude to God by understanding that our identity doesn't stop with just ourselves, but that we know ourselves as people of God together. That's why Jesus would have us do unto others as we would do unto ourselves. That's why Jesus calls on us to not only love God, but also to love others as ourselves.

God's vision is bountiful, God's grace is bountiful, and it's for us to always remember that God desires a sharing of that vision with others in ways that boldly proclaim our God and express God's goodness. And here, all around us today in this Harvest Home service, we see our response to God's call; we see St. Peter's saying yes to God's call to partnership.

I heard an evangelist once say that his game plan as a Christian is to love the heck out of people as Jesus loves them, knowing that there is

nothing they can do about it. We are freed in Christ to be bountiful Christians; to embrace God's grand vision for our world and declare it to the world unapologetically.

As Christians, we turn to God, not asking what we must do to be a good Christian, but what we can do. What can we do to reflect the bountiful love of heaven? Part of the answer to that question to God is to practice our faith enough to see as God sees; that is, to see with the heart; the sacred heart of Jesus. And when we do, we begin to notice things and people that too often go unnoticed; people that haven't experienced God's bounty; that feel invisible, maybe even forgotten. They are the forgotten fields, so to speak. But there is much beauty and goodness in unnoticed fields. Just as an unnoticed, fallow field in the fall can know its own beauty with the gold of goldenrod and the purple of purple asters, so can unnoticed people of a community, just trying to make ends meet, hold much goodness and beauty for those with eyes to see. For those who pause and see as Jesus sees, we find in unnoticed fields of our communities – the streets of struggle and poverty – we find the same hope,

love and dreams of all humanity. But who will sow the fields to reap heaven's blessings? We pray that eyes of compassion turn to them, and see a calling to serve God.

This is a poem I read for a fall worship service some years back. I like it, because it's written by a poet who knows how to see beauty in the countryside where others could easily pass by, leaving such beauty invisible in their busy world.

His name is Ted Kooser. He grew up in Iowa, then moved to Nebraska. The poem is called "In the Corners of the Fields." He said of the poem, "The Nebraska landscape is full of lots of things that might go unnoticed otherwise. And I've made it a sort of specialty to spend some time looking at these things."

Here is the poem:

Something is calling to me
from the corners of fields,
where the leftover fence wire
suns its loose coils, and stones
thrown out of the furrow
sleep in warm litters;
where the gray faces
of old No Hunting signs

mutter into the wind,
and dry horse tanks spout fountains of sunflowers;
where a moth
flutters in from the pasture,
harried by sparrows,
and alights on a post,
so sure of its life
that it peacefully opens its wings.

Grace, heaven's grace, would leave no field, no corner of a field, untouched and forgotten; left unnoticed. Every field of humanity is ready to spring forth with hope and joy and love, if there are those who see beauty and goodness there through the eyes of God. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

You never know when you sow God's soil. You never know what goodness grows out of every effort. From our perspective, we may only see the row that we're hoeing, but God sees beyond. When my great-great grandfather Hanson came to Buffalo in the 1800s, he got a job delivering goods, working for the person who owned the horse and wagon. Later, he became a cop in the city, until he and his brother could buy a small piece of land out by the lake. Not great soil, but like the American story, each

effort brought something better in following generations. Efforts, good efforts, bring forth growth and goodness in life, and that's true also for the church.

Yes, and the same is true of our church and each member in it. Every effort doesn't reveal what God can see, and we can only work one row at a time in the field, but it's absolutely true that we can believe, even expect, that we are part of a great and heavenly vision. When we serve God, we can dare expect that God will do great things. We compliment God by asking great things for our world, and we dare see ourselves in the midst of that vision, even one row at a time in God's field.

In the just reward of labor, God's will is done, says the hymn. In the help we give our neighbor, God's will is done. In our worldwide task of caring for the hungry and despairing, in the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

Holy God, we thank you for your bountiful love, and ask that, by your grace, we may share your goodness with others in word and deed. Amen.