

Greetings in the name of the Holy One of Israel who inspired the writer of Psalm 103 to exalt: “Praise the Lord...and forget not all God’s benefits!” Beloved Psalm 103 is an invitation for you and me to take time to “remember.”

But then you members of WHLC don’t need a psalm to “remind” you to remember, do you? After all, that is what you’ve been doing for 8 months - remembering the 75 years of this congregation’s history. And I wager that most of you are aware that “remembering” leads to praise - praise to GOD! And I ALSO wager you’ve been praising God with vibrant song sung and played by talented musicians so there is no dust up there on those rafters! (the ribs of the ship).

The words of Psalm 103 are so familiar (“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is in me, bless God’s holy name”) most of us do not NOTICE how “odd” the words are! The Psalm is “the self” summoning “the self”...to praise! Psalm 103 begins with the worshiper talking to himself. “I must remember, remember that ALL of life must be referred to GOD’S goodness and THEREFORE I must praise God with my whole being.” Or as I like to put it: “You and I are to praise God with our lips and with our lives.” Ah how this congregation has loved to praise God with full-throated song. And how we pastors - how Norm...and Hans...and Cindy...and Erik... and I “thrilled” to sing with you.

On a hot summer day the car parked in front of me at a stop and go light had its radio up so high that the “bass” on the song coming from its radio shook my car! There was a bumper sticker on that car that read: “If it’s too loud you are too old.” Well I may be 81 years of age (the age where “happy hour is a nap”) but I’ll never be too old sing praises to my Lord!

When I’m out on the road leading worship (something I do at least 46 times a year my in retirement) people comment on my singing voice leading the 200 plus worshippers in the large Decorah Lutheran sanctuary...the 16 every-Sunday faithful in Saetersdal rural church in SE, Minnesota...or the 6 to 10 residents of nursing homes in Rochester, where I lead worship four times a month. “Praise the Lord, O my soul, and ALL that is within me, Praise God’s holy name!”

Well, the nine or ten pastors, whose advisor and instructor I was for 12 years (with each cohort for three years at a time) who were seeking their doctor’s degree at Luther Seminary heard me “get on them” if they ended any sentences of their sermons in a soft voice. And so did the seminary students in the three classes I also taught each of the first three years after I left here (until the seminary could not afford to pay us adjunct professors). “Praise the Lord, O my soul, and ALL that is within me, praise God’s holy name!” End that, and ever sentence, “going uphill” in voice!

“...and...do NOT forget ALL God’s acts of kindness.” “Remember all the good things God has done!” With the help of your newsletter articles and reflections from the founding pastor’s son, in this 75th year you ARE “remembering” the courage God gave to early members to mortgage

their homes to help pay for the church, the dedication to work all day at a job, and then come home to change clothes and go to pound nails, build cabinets, construct the first unit of WHLC, and be fed by the women who brought food - before THEY got-down-and-dirty in the construction as well.

Yet, you are remembering more this anniversary year. You are remembering a God who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from Pit (that is rescues from the “near death” of despair). And more. The Lord has treated (and continues to treat) the people who over the years who have called this “their church” - treated them like royalty by crowning them (as on a coronation day) with a crown made of steadfast love and mercy and by renewing them with strength like eagles.

Many of you know that Cathy’s strength was renewed after radical breast cancer surgery and chemo and radiation twelve years ago, and who is now longing for renewal from her lung cancer surgery in April. Many know that our son Kent participates in the healing of people as a cardiac anesthesiologist, specializing in echo cardiology at Mayo Clinic. His wife has sought “renewing strength” for years after each bout with her chronic illness. Thankfully our three grand children (16, 14, and 10) are “renewed” as they grow “like eagles.”

There has been challenging work, faithful work to do in this place over 75 years. One part was the dedication and energy and compassion and financial commitment shown by countless as this congregation resettled six refugee families, and worked on boards of directors, and in places of service in the DSM area where persons of all ages were struggling with life or oppression.

Our daughter Ann, who is in her 20th year as Director of Communications at Fourth Presbyterian Church on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, a congregation of 5,400 members and 130 employees, and is also a member of the staff communication team, a team that serves the community through youth development programs for students living in under-resourced neighborhoods and its social service programs for those on the streets who are struggling with self-sufficiency.

A pastor in Rochester asked me if I would lead his weekly 6:30 AM Bible Study while he was on a three month sabbatical this summer. This “in-depth” Bible study on Isaiah took lots of preparation. But I learned more about Isaiah in those three months than I did in seminary, or in teaching parts of Isaiah in the parish or preaching on it. The one thing that struck me (and the class of nearly 20) is how the prophet constantly talked about GOD’s concern for the most vulnerable in the land - echoing God’s command in the Old Testament: “You shall love the stranger in your land for you were strangers in Egypt.” The Psalmist thinks of all the oppressed whose cause is upheld by a compassionate God, who works through compassionate people, like the compassionate people of THIS congregation.

The Hebrew title for the Book of Psalms is “The Book of Praises.” You, today can join the endless praise of God’s people across the ages, join by praising God with our lips **and** with our lives.

“Praise and Remember”...praise GOD and remember to sing praises to our God with your lips **and** with your lives! (And as you and I do so, remember: the empire can withstand anything – except - the singing of Doxologies!)

So I invite you to sing many times, a fabulous hymn of praise, **my current most favorite hymn...**

#525 in the ELW – “You Are Holy.”