November 15, 2015   
Psalm 150   
*Rejoice*

Rev. Kerry Smith   
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 150

Hallelujah! Praise God in the holy temple; praise God in the mighty firmament.

Praise God for mighty acts; praise God for exceeding greatness.

Praise God with trumpet sound; praise God with lyre and harp.

Praise God with tambourine and dance; praise God with strings and pipe..

Praise God with resounding cymbals; praise God with loud clanging cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise God, hallelujah!

Today we celebrate 74 years of worship, 74 years of making a difference as Greenland Hills United Methodist Church. In the spring of 1941 the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church saw the growth of Highland Park UMC and they looked into the idea of a nearby neighborhood church. November 9, 1941 the first worship service was held at Stonewall Jackson School with 87 charter members.

Robert has already started the journey for us back to 1941 musically, and I want to continue that journey. In January 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had been sworn in for his third term as President, in February the USO (United Service Organization) was created to entertain the American troops and Bob Hope performed his first show for the USO in May, Orson Welles’ film Citizen Kane premiered in New York City in May, Joe DiMaggio’s 56 game hitting streak began in May, in June all German and Italian assets in the United States were frozen and all German and Italian consulates in the United States were ordered closed and their staffs forced to leave the country by July. As a response to the Japanese occupation of French Indochina, all Japanese assets in the US were seized in July. In September the USS Greer is the first US ship fired upon by a German submarine in the war even though the US was a neutral power at the time. Tension continued to heighten between the US and Germany.[[1]](#footnote-2)

In October Walt Disney’s animated film Dumbo is released and also in October after 14 years of work, drilling is completed on Mount Rushmore. In October the US also has its first causalities of what will become World War II as two destroyers are torpedoed and sunk and more than 100 US Navy sailors are killed. December 7, 1941 gave us the attack on Pearl Harbor and a US declaration of war on Japan. Declarations against Germany and Italy are quick to follow.[[2]](#footnote-3)

It is in the midst of all of this that Greenland Hills begins to worship as a family of faith. In 1942 this land was purchased and money was raised throughout the war to build this church. In January 1946 there is a groundbreaking and on October 27, 1946 the first worship service is held in this new Austin stone church. No steel was used as they built because they couldn’t get any because of the war.

I look around this building and I think of the people who created this place. They weren’t scared. They loved God, and even though they had experienced a second world war, they built. Even though they were filled with fear and uncertainty, they built. They lived a life of abundance, not a life of fear, not a life of judgment, not a life of scarcity.

For us here today, as our world was shaken with the terrorist attacks in Paris and a funeral that was bombed in Baghdad and suicide bombings in Beirut, we are filled with fear. Terrorism is meant to inspire fear.[[3]](#footnote-4) And I think about the people who gathered 74 years ago because they knew that they needed to not hide their fears, they needed to be honest about their fear in a loving community of faith. They did not need to lash out in vengeance and violence[[4]](#footnote-5). They needed to work for peace, cooperation and mutual respect as a direct challenge to those who used force, terror and destruction in World War II.

In the midst of uncertainty, when we are gripped with fear, it is then that we can remember that God is there. As Psalm 150 reminded us, we can praise God in the holy temple, we can praise God for mighty acts and with trumpet sound and tambourine and dance and loud clanging cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise God.

This week I visited with one of our folks who has been at Greenland Hills the longest, not because he is that old but because he lives three doors down and he grew up right next to the church. I wanted him to share with me a story of perseverance, some time when the church really struggled and made it through. And the stories that he told me were about putting one foot in front of the other, keep on keeping on. Continuing to praise God and worship and be a place of community and love and welcome and make a difference.

Koinonia is a word that you might know.  It is a Greek word that means fellowship or community.  But the Greek also means contribution.  When you are in a community, when you are in fellowship with people then you contribute.  You show up, you participate, you give, you serve. Remember the question that is asked of folks who want to join Greenland Hills, “As a member of this congregation of Greenland Hills, will your faithfully participate in its ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service and your witness?”

And I thought of Russell Faulhaber’s story about Vernon Stamps. Vernon sang in the choir and he was one of the charter members of the church. Now Vernon had no rhythm but he could sing the notes and when Russell started singing in the choir when he was in high school, Russell had rhythm but he couldn’t sing the notes. So, Russell and Vernon together made one complete and perfect singer!

I thought of the ecumenical group the East Dallas Cooperative Parish that was formed so that churches in East Dallas could work together to provide the churches with resources to become outposts of service for their neighbors in need. We realized that churches working together could be a really good thing.

I thought of Tom Rubel who at every Church Council meeting would always make sure to ask, “Where we gonna get the money from?” I wonder what Tom would have said when we started raising money for Glory Be Hall right in the economic downturn of 2008? For 74 years this church has lived a life of abundant life for God. There were years when there weren’t many people. There were years when there wasn’t much money, but koinonia was here. Fellowship, community, contribution. You show up, you participate, you give, you serve.

Yesterday, I was on social media and I read a post about the tragic events this week. The post said, “Pretty sure religion is at the core of these events – so maybe let’s just not pray at all.” The post continued: “Pretty sure I haven’t seen one #PrayersforBeirut or #PrayersforBaghdad.” And I totally understand where that person is coming from. Some days I am amazed that any one still comes to church at all. Seriously. And how many of you have said before, I am a Christian, but not that kind of Christian?

Greenland Hills is a place that does real, authentic spirituality. It is a place that seeks real relationship with a living God and we seek real relationship within community even when it’s messy and often it is. At Greenland Hills we think all people are God’s Beloved. Yes, we mean those who are LGBTQ and every other person you might have in mind. We treasure beauty in vibrant music, striking art, expressive words, ordinary surprises that means we think God shows up in the world now in all kinds of ways. We ask the hard questions about life and faith so our faith will become our own. We baptize and help raise children in the faith. We think our primary purpose is to live and love as Jesus did. That means we are building a world where compassion and justice are the standard of living for all people. We are many people doing lots of things to help God change the world.[[5]](#footnote-6)

We are a church that hurts when others hurt and so we do pray for our world. We pray for those in Beirut and Baghdad and Paris and Syria and those who are Syrian refugees and we pray for those who were affected by earthquakes in Japan and Mexico. And we come together to praise God as we faithfully participate in the life of this church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness. Amen.

1. 1941 facts are all taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1941\_in\_the\_United\_States [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. 1941 facts are all taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1941\_in\_the\_United\_States [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. From Eric Folkerth’s facebook post: https://www.facebook.com/eric.folkerth/posts/10208266314719875?fref=nf&pnref=story [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. From Eric Folkerth’s facebook post: https://www.facebook.com/eric.folkerth/posts/10208266314719875?fref=nf&pnref=story [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Taken from the Vision and Values studies in the fall of 2012 at Greenland Hills. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)