

There's a man trying to cross the street. As he steps off the curb a car comes screaming around the corner and heads straight for him. The man walks faster, trying to hurry across the street, but the car changes lanes and is still coming at him.

So the guy turns around to go back, but the car changes lanes again and is still coming at him. By now, the car is so close and the man so scared that he just freezes and stops in the middle of the road. The car gets real close, then swerves at the last possible moment and screeches to a halt right next to him.

The driver rolls down the window. The driver is a squirrel. The squirrel says to the man, **“See, it's not as easy as it looks, is it?”**

I don't know about you, but, I have trouble at Thanksgiving. I never can decide what to put on my plate. There's too many choices – we have such abundance in our lives. It always surprises me how much food we can prepare for one meal. I hesitate at each item -- Do I want stuffing or sweet potatoes? Do I have room for green beans, and cranberries because I know I want mashed potatoes? I go this way and that way, filling my plate with more than I can possibly eat. I realize I have left no room for the turkey and gravy. At Thanksgiving, filling your plate is not as easy as it looks!

After worship today we have a brief congregational meeting to elect new Deacons and Elders. And after that we have a Thankful Sunday Brunch – food and

desserts already prepared for you. Giving Thanks is one way we remember our past – and one way we remember our God, who has continually blessed us.

There are times when we overlook being thankful for what we have in life. We forget to take time to thank God for our blessings; we fail to acknowledge those who have sacrificed for us; we overlook our loved ones, those most important to us, and take them for granted.

**Being thankful is not as easy as it looks!**

I don't know why we do such things. I do them myself and wonder how I, at times, can be ungrateful, uncaring as a Christian.

**Being a Christian is not as easy as it looks!**

Ps. 126, is a short but wonderful little Psalm; part of a group of psalms (120-134) that were sung and recited by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. They're known as the Songs of Ascents; the noun translated "ascents" is from a Hebrew root meaning "to go up". The psalms reflect the various families/kindred who, regularly, go up to Jerusalem. The noun can also mean steps or stairs – for the steps of the Temple and the stairs to the city of David.

These fifteen psalms are also known as Pilgrim Psalms. Pilgrims embark on a quest for the sacred. Our individual pilgrimages to homes for Thanksgiving Dinner can be considered a quest for the sacred. Family is a sacred unit as are dear friends. Things don't always go smoothly in families and friendships, but

nonetheless, they are sacred and meaningful and close to our hearts. Much like our own families, is a church family. It too is sacred and yes, things don't always go smoothly in churches. **It's not as easy as it looks!**

Individuals and families from all over came together in Jerusalem for different Feasts and Celebrations to worship God and receive God's blessings. Our lives, our Christian pilgrimages are not just a one-time search, **but a lifelong journey seeking God's purpose for our life.** Our journeys bring us together at Valley Presbyterian Church. We seek God's **Blessings and Bounty** while we worship here and in all the many ways we serve God as a church family.

And the Good News from our psalm is that God restored the fortunes of Zion. When God did it before for Zion, **they dreamed; they were filled with laughter; they shouted with joy; they rejoiced!**

The psalmist asks God, so can we, "Restore our fortunes, O Lord." You've done it before – do it again. You have done it here at VPC, do it again Lord!

Restore our fortunes! Make us laugh and shout with joy! That'll be a great Thanksgiving. That'll be more blessings than we can count.

We also know that we have sowed in tears this year. A seed must die for a new plant to spring up. Old ways and old days die hard. So, we go out weeping at times, bearing the seed for sowing something new.

But, we have been blessed. **We are stuffed with blessings!** Marti Long, at last Wednesday's Hope and Healing service in the Spiritual Life Center, suggested an Alphabet of Gratitude. Go through the alphabet and find yourself a blessing beginning with each letter of the alphabet. There is much we can all be grateful for.

Your pastors hear, see and feel **a spirit of heartfelt and trusting hope** at Valley. **THANK YOU for your hope!** In this hope we sense your trustfulness in God, which strengthens you. **THANK YOU for your trust!** More blessings from God -- for Hope and Trust produce dreams. **THANK YOU for your dreams!**

We catch dreams throughout our lives; we are awed by God's majesty; filled with God's unending grace; and thus, we find ourselves praising God, dreaming of a better life, a life of joy and laughter – a life of blessings. It's okay to dream.

**People dream and God restores fortunes.**

**People dream and God gives new life – new energy – new vitality.**

**People dream and God gives new courage.**

**People dream and God gives new creative ways to do God's work.**

**Dream this Thanksgiving! Share your blessings,** knowing that God is doing new and exciting things here at Valley. There will be new ways and new days – a new normal -- and it will come out of our shared experience.

Scripture encourages us to move from sowing tears to shouts of joy.

Scripture encourages us to move from sorrow to happiness.

Scripture encourages us to move from shaky ground to a firm foundation.

All because God continually blesses us. **We are stuffed with blessings!**

And we shall come home with shouts of joy, praising our Lord and Savior for what he has accomplished in our church family. We shall **all** be blessed with God's goodness. "It was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.'" The Lord is doing great things for us, and we will rejoice." **We are stuffed with blessings!**

**Let us anticipate a bright future! Let us be hopeful! Let us dream!**

**Amen.**