

## God's Gracious Acts

### First Sunday After Christmas Day

Isaiah 63:7-9

<sup>7</sup> I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

<sup>8</sup> For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely"; and he became their savior

<sup>9</sup> in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

As we praise God this first Sunday after Christmas we look back on all God's gracious acts this year! God allowed us to worship each Sunday... and the prophet reminds us "I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love."

God allowed us to fellowship each first Sunday during the coffee hour... and the prophet reminds us "I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD."

God allowed us to sing, cry and pray together... and the prophet reminds us "I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love."

God allowed us share our resources of time, talents and finances... and the prophet reminds us "I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD."

God allowed us to support Carriage Town Ministries by worshipping and serving meals each 5<sup>th</sup> Monday... and the prophet reminds us "I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done

for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.”

God allowed us to provide a safe and comfortable place for Valley School to provide educational instructions... and the prophet reminds us “I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD.”

God allowed some of us to attend spiritual enrichment, study and renewal at Crystal... and the prophet reminds us “I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.”

God allowed Eric to spend the summer and much of the fall ministering to campers at Crystal... and the prophet reminds us “I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD.”

God allowed us to scholarship 2 campers to attend Crystal... and the prophet reminds us “I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD.”

God allowed two of us to attend workshops on church safety... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us.

God allowed three of us to attend a consultation on church stewardship and policy... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us to support Karla's ministry to the homeless... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us.

God allowed us, under Linda's leadership to minister to children and caregivers through the Angel Tree ministry... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the

praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us, through Eric's leadership to teach the Angel Tree children about the true ministry of giving... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us.

God allowed us to celebrate the life and ministry of Lila Smith... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us to celebrate the life and ministry of Bill Dell... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us to celebrate the life and ministry of Lucille Newhart... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us to celebrate the lives and ministries of Mazie Butler, Louise Bachmann and Joann Taft... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us to pray for family, friends and neighbors... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us.

God allowed us to lament over illnesses... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us to lament over wars...natural disasters...I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has

done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us to lament over mistreatment...bullying... religious persecution... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us to lament over divided politics... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD.

God allowed us to lament over injustice... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us to share food with those who are food insecure... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD.

God allowed us to pray for those who lack a relationship with Jesus... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

God allowed us to share our testimonies of God's love and care, not that we don't have challenges, but that God allowed us to endure... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us.

God has sent His Holy Spirit to protect, guide and forgive us... I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us; he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

Still lingering from the afterglow of Christmas cheer and after the Christmas crowds have thinned out, Isaiah sings, "I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the

praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us" (v. 7). For many of us who sit in post-Christmas worship, the profound feeling in the air does not reflect what Isaiah chants in these verses. Fatigue and financial woes, dashed expectations and lingering doubt are often the lyrics of the unsung song of post-Christmas worship, rather than gratitude and praise.

So much about Christmas in and out of the church suffers from shallow sentimentality and hollow theology. "Be of good cheer" masks the reality that much of the time life is anything but cheery. Throughout Advent and Christmas, popular culture bleeds over into the church's theology as baby Jesus rides with Santa on the way to battle the Grinch. Pre-or post-Christmas, we hear far too little about the God who cares deeply enough for the world to enter the human fray. Isaiah speaks first in the voice of an angry and disillusioned God who is not interested in spiritual sentimentality but in a community of the faithful who will live in covenant fidelity despite their circumstances.

Surely, if ever the church is to sing of God's saving grace, it is on the Sunday after the boxes are unwrapped and the tree has dropped its needles. As the church enters a new calendar year and approaches the celebration of Epiphany, perhaps one gift of our scripture is a resolution worthy of a church-wide effort to keep. Instead of pledging ourselves to exercise every day in the coming year or to lose all the Christmas fat or to watch less TV and read more books, maybe this lection invites the community of God's people to a new posture of prayer and a new way to live in the world. What if, even when the world is harsh and ugly and severe, the people of God awoke each day to utter and then live this prayer: "I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us" (v. 7)? This prayer would extend Christmas far beyond its twelve days and would remind us that Christmas is always far more about God than about us. **Gary W. Charles**

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration.