

## Not to Us but to Your Name Be the Glory

### Psalm 115:1-18 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. <sup>2</sup> Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?" <sup>3</sup> Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. <sup>4</sup> But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. <sup>5</sup> They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. <sup>6</sup> They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. <sup>7</sup> They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. <sup>8</sup> Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. <sup>9</sup> All you Israelites, trust in the LORD— he is their help and shield. <sup>10</sup> House of Aaron, trust in the LORD— he is their help and shield. <sup>11</sup> You who fear him, trust in the LORD— he is their help and shield. <sup>12</sup> The LORD remembers us and will bless us: He will bless his people Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron, <sup>13</sup> he will bless those who fear the LORD— small and great alike. <sup>14</sup> May the LORD cause you to flourish, both you and your children. <sup>15</sup> May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. <sup>16</sup> The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to mankind. <sup>17</sup> It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to the place of silence; <sup>18</sup> it is we who extol the LORD, both now and forevermore. Praise the LORD.

25, 167, 179, 20, 4, and 1. Not the winning Powerball numbers, but these numbers do all have special meaning for Light of the Valley. This congregation has been meeting together and worshiping for 25 years as of this month. In 25 years, this congregation has given the blessed, saving sacrament of baptism, the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, to 167 people. 179 people have been brought into membership and fellowship at this congregation through instruction, confirmation, affirmation, or profession of faith. In those 25 years, we've had the bittersweet experiences of "transferring" 20 people to the Church Triumphant, to heaven – not that we really had a say in that, but we gratefully acknowledge that God has graciously taken these people to dwell with him. In 25 years, there have been 4 full-time pastors serving this congregation and the people of Layton and beyond. As a congregation, we have purchased 1 building - this building - and gave it a significant overhaul. God be praised for all these things that he has done for us over these past 25 years.

At the same time, though, it's really tempting to take credit for these numbers. I mean, how many people did I invite to this church over the last 25 years? How many people were baptized and confirmed here because I brought them here, sat them down, talked to them about my church? How many hours of labor have I put into this church over those 25 years to make it what it is today? How many projects over the years have I done to benefit the church? Would there have been 167 baptisms without me? Would there have been 179 people join the church if not for me? Would we have this building the way it is if not for me? You know that you've contributed to making this church what it is today, and isn't it about time you get some pats on the back for it?

About a month ago, Wendy and I attended an event with the Interfaith Council of Ogden to meet Ogden's new police chief. The event went about how I expected it to go. All the religious leaders were thanking the police department for all they do to help make the city a better place, and the new chief thanked all the religious leaders who in his words are the ones who have really made Ogden better. On the car ride back, I asked Wendy what she thought of the event. She said, "That was a lot of back-patting." I asked her what she meant by that. She said, "I'm not sure I can put my finger on it, but it bugged me." After talking about it a little longer, she pinpointed why it bugged her: "They were all congratulating themselves for making the city a better place. They were taking all the glory. I know it's really not our accomplishments or efforts that changed the city. We give all glory to God for those changes, not us." My wife espoused the words of Psalm 115: "Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness." (verse 1)

In the last 25 years with this congregation, what can we really take credit for? Did I make people come to church? Did I make them believe? Did I convince people with the right words to make them join this church? Did I clothe people with righteousness through baptism? Did I secure the deal to get this building? Was it my gifted tongue which preached the best sermons you've ever heard which made people stay? Or was that really the tongue of Unnasch or Glende or Lange who preached the best sermons that brought droves of people to the church because they knew how to preach? Did I do all the construction and renovations on this sanctuary? Did I make this church a family?

It's so tempting to take credit for these things, that I contributed, I made it happen. But you and I know that we can't take that credit. I don't convert people. I don't bring people to faith. I don't make people keep coming to church. I cannot take an unrelated group of people and make them into a family. I don't make people give. Even when I have been maybe the sole donor for something or sole provider, who gave the means to provide? Who gave me the abilities to do these things?

In fact, if I take credit for these things, what else do I have to take credit for? If I take credit for all these good things over the last 25 years, am I exempt for all the bad things, that I have no culpability in what I would rather not mention? Have you ever contemplated a different set of numbers – not the successes, but the failures. Have you ever contemplated numbers like how many visitors I failed to greet or make feel welcome here? How many times did I have an opportunity to share my faith and yet I didn't? How many times did I speak angrily to a fellow church member, harbor resentment against them, talk about them behind their back? How many times did I complain about the things going on a church, cause divisions? How many times did I put unnecessary hindrances to people coming here to hear the Word of God? Did I ever drive anyone away from church? If so, how many people? How many times? How many words have I said that I can't take back. How many actions did I do to fellow believers that I can't undo?

I would certainly love to take credit for the numerical growth of the church and the faithfulness of the people here, but, please, God, don't count those other instances of how many times my words, my actions, my attitude tried to destroy the church and tear it apart. Don't give me credit for all the things I have done over the last 25 years that have been harmful to my faith and to the spiritual welfare of others. Not to us, Lord, not to us count these sins and hold them against our names.

I don't know how many instances of these sins it would be. I don't know that number, and quite frankly I don't want to know that number. That's not the number that matters. Even the numbers 25, 167, 179, 20, and 4 are not the numbers that matter today. It's not about us. The number that really matters is 1.

1 is the number of Gods that we have. We have 1 Creator, 1 Savior, 1 Sanctifier – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We have 1 3-in-1 God. 1 is the number of lives that God has given to each of us to live to get to know him and what he has done for us. 1 is the number of lives that our God gave for us to wipe out an innumerable count of sins over the last 25 years. Our 1 God has given us 1 hope, 1 heavenly home that he has prepared for us, 1 home that he will come back and take us to be because he has given his 1 perfect life, his 1 sacrificial death for us. 1 is the number of baptisms that God gave us to cleanse us from our sins, to drape over our dirty, sin-stained lives his righteousness, worthiness, and perfection. The 1 Holy Spirit worked on our hearts and caused us to believe this 1 truth. This 1 Holy Spirit through that 1 truth that we have 1 Lord and 1 Savior has brought all of us together, as different as we are, as numerous as we are, as sinful as we are, into 1 body, 1 Holy Christian and apostolic church, 1 community of believers. 1 person gets all the credit for it: the LORD our God, the 1 God who dwells in heaven and does whatever pleases him, the 1 God who is the Maker of heaven and earth. Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory because of your love and faithfulness. (verse 1)

This 1 LORD has been the 1 God always and will be forever. He is the 1 help of his people, their 1 shield. When we were not loving to other people here at church, to one another, God loved us unconditionally. When our faithfulness to God waned as it looked like we weren't being as blessed as we had hoped – whether at church or in our personal lives – God remained faithful to what he did for us and what he had promised to do for us. When times looked tough, when people were not coming in droves to our church and people were not giving enough to sustain the ministry here, God was our help who got us through those times of less. When winds came and tore shingles off of our roof and when the winds came again and took a third of our front roof overhang off, God was our shield, protecting us from harm, shielded this building to still give us a place to gather and worship him and praise his name. When we felt forgotten by him as we had to say goodbye to fellow believers, God remembered us. Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory because of your love and faithfulness. (verse 1)

Under this 1 God, we have been so blessed. Today is not so much about the numbers 25, 167, 179, 20, and 4. It's not about us. Today is about the number 1, that our God is number 1 in our lives. It is this 1 God who has seen us through 25 years of serving this community with his Word. It is this 1 God who gave us the blessings of the forgiveness of sins, new life, and eternal salvation in heaven to all 167 people baptized here. It is this 1 God who brought 179 people here to learn God's Word through these 4 different servants, 4 different pastors. God gave us the privilege of ushering 20 of his saints to their heavenly home where we will yet join them and praise the LORD with them forevermore. To God's name be the glory!

No matter what time in this church's history, whether it was 1 year in, 10 years, 25 years, 50 years, 100 years, 1000 years, we will have always that same 1 God who remembers us, who blesses us, who is our help and our shield. So, today, we give thanks to that 1 God. We praise him now today, and we will praise him forevermore. Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory because of your love and faithfulness. (verse 1) Amen.