

Michael Gehring
“Giving Thanks”
Luke 22: 14–20
October 7, 2018
Main Street UMC
Kernersville, NC

I’ve got to confess something to you. When I’m driving around town and no one else is in the car, I’m singing loudly, badly, and terribly off key, but nonetheless, I’m singing with gusto. I’m singing with so much energy you’d swear that I was auditioning for *American Idol* and Simon Cowell is just about to pronounce a verdict that I’m going to the next level, like Hollywood, or something.

And it goes without saying, that what I’m listening to is the radio station that plays nothing but the 1980’s tunes.

Along with *Mike and the Mechanics* I’m singing:

*Every generation
 Blames the one before
 And all of their frustrations
 Come beating on your door.*

Or I’m jamming with *Simple Minds*:

*Don’t you, forget about me
 Don’t, don’t, don’t, don’t
 Don’t you, forget about me.*

Or along with the son of New Jersey I’m in toning:

*Glory days, well, they’ll pass you by
 Glory days, in the wink of a young girl’s eye
 Glory days, glory days.*

I love the 80’s. I even loved a lot of the TV shows from the 80’s. One of my favorites was *Cheers*. Do you remember that one about Sam Malone, an ex-baseball player for the Boston Red Sox who runs Cheers, a neighborhood bar in Boston? It had such an interesting cast: Sam, a bar owner, who goes religiously to AA and never touches the stuff, Coach, Sam’s friend from the baseball world, Carla, the wise cracking waitress, Norm, the sometimes-employed accountant,

Cliff, the know it all mailman, and Diane, the perennial graduate student. And do you remember the song?

*Making the way in the world today takes everything you've got.
Taking a break from all your worries, sure would help a lot.
Wouldn't you like to get away?
Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came.
You wanna be where you can see, our troubles are all the same
You wanna be where everybody knows your name.*

When I was in seminary, I would watch Cheers and that theme song haunted me in a way, because I always wanted to know why the church couldn't be more like that place where everyone knows your name and is always glad you came? That place that welcomes everyone just the same. I mentioned to you before one of those memories from childhood that sears is the image of my father being excluded from Communion. I knew that one day I wanted to be part of a church where everyone was welcomed to the feast, where everyone could come and partake.

You know Jesus called together an interesting group of individuals to form that first community: a tax-collector (someone economically well off but despised), a zealot (a social revolutionary), fishermen (I wonder how many of them were illiterate; you know some had to be), and some of the apostles we don't even know what they did or if they did. But it's interesting: once they started to follow Jesus, they all belonged to the community before they had correct theology. They belonged before they understood what Jesus' mission was really about.

And sometime after the resurrection, Jesus assembled this rag tag community and charged them: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always to the end of the age."*

The Jerusalem Cross has the large cross in the center signifying that in Jerusalem Christ died upon the cross. And the four little crosses represent the four corners of the world. It is from Jerusalem that the Gospel, the good news, has gone forth to the north, the south, the east, and the west, to the four corners of the world. The Gospel has gone forth.

I love how it says in the narthex that our mission is to *Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*. And that our vision is *Fostering vital communities through love and life-changing experiences*.

May we truly be the church that dares to care, that knows and shares God's love, and strives to be a place where everyone knows your name and is always glad that you came.