

Psalm 146

1 Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
2 I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
3 Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.

5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
6 who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
7 who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free;
8 the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
9 The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
10 The Lord will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord!

Romans 12:9-17

9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.[e] 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;[f] do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Lest we forget, let's go ahead and together say our mission statement to recall where God's called us as a community and to consider how these readings from the Psalms and from Romans relate to our missional identity. As Christ Lutheran Church, we're **a fellowship living and sharing the love of God through worship, service, wellness, and hospitality**. Today, we focus upon wellness, and it seems that Paul's words offer a nice summation of what wellness looks like: *Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good*. To pursue wellness is to hold fast to what is good.

How do we define good? In this passage from Romans, everything that follows this phrase, *hold fast to what is good*, goes to show what goodness looks like. It highlights what we

should hold onto in order to be well. We hold on to love and honor, enthusiasm and courage, service and joy, patience and prayer, selflessness and hospitality, blessing even our persecutors, weeping and rejoicing alongside those with reason to weep or to celebrate, seeking harmony and humility, and earning a reputation for what's right. When we hold fast to these things, with God at the center of them, we find ourselves well.

Notice that herein, Paul speaks to wellness that begins with spirituality within the community. Each one of these behaviors is directed at life as a community. Now, remember that we talked a few weeks ago about the importance of spirituality for Paul, and for us all as a church. Everything is spiritual, so we must remember that God is in everything, and everything that is good is directed at God. Wellness recognizes this pervasive presence of God, so that how we respond to someone crying next to us is a sign of

wellness and a sign of faith. How we deal with struggles is a sign of our wellness and our faith. How we love others and how high we think of ourselves is a sign of our wellness and a sign of our faith. In every juncture of life, God is present, and our response to those events and God's presence indicates whether we're on a journey of wellness or a journey of destruction.

As we see this pervasive spirituality of God within everything, we see it especially within our relationships. Notice that almost everything Paul mentions relates to our dealings with other people. This focus on relationships suggests that we can't be well in ourselves if we're not in healthy relationships with one another. Personal wellness requires healthy relationships. To be well, we need both to allow others to help us, as well as enable ourselves to help others. Even introverts like myself need people to live life well, for we can neither do everything well on our own, nor

should we allow others to suffer if we can assist them in their plights. Our wellness begins in a community committed to wellness in Christ.

There's a danger to pursuing wellness on our own. We can often deceive ourselves, believing that we're holding onto the good when, in fact, we're in fact quite unwell. I've shared before about my struggles with bulimia, but what some may not know is that this arose out of my attempt as a high schooler to lose weight. Entering my sophomore year, I was tired of being tired, of feeling unconformable in my body, of feeling unattractive and unloveable. So, I began to lose weight, and it started as a journey of wellness. I started with a low-carb diet, a healthy choice, and began to exercise regularly in addition to walking a few miles a day on the golf course whenever I was able. The weight began to come off, and soon I'd lost nearly eighty pounds. But I wasn't satisfied yet, so I began to use diet pills that included

ephedrine. When I lost a few more pounds, I began to use many more pills a day than suggested. When that stopped working is when bulimia seemed like a good idea. I didn't consult my doctors, my friends, or my family, but instead began to more and more hide my behavior all in the name of "wellness." I lost 100 pounds, but I also lost control of myself. That left me very unwell for a very long time, and has left me with chronic issues to deal with for the rest of my life, including increased risks for heart disease, low blood pressure, low blood sugar, and all that low self-esteem I wanted to get rid of? It just got replaced with shame and fear.

Though not everyone has faced these particular experiences, we each know at some level how easy it is to fool ourselves into believing a very bad idea might be alright, that something destructive might somehow lead to wellness. To be well in Christ, we must be together in Christ.

This allows us to represent Christ, to literally re-present the Lord to one another, when others seem to be following idols rather than finding Jesus. We can't be well on our own, not for long. We can fool ourselves for a while, but at some point, we begin using the mirrors in our lives to affirm the flaws rather than identify the places for improvement.

As a community, we've already identified all sorts of areas to focus upon as aspects of wellness. Wellness for us looks like inclusion through Across the Spectrum, ensuring that there's a place of welcome for people of all abilities. Wellness for us looks like extension of our selves beyond ourselves through ministries like Highlander Lutherans, reminding us that God doesn't call us upward, but sends us outward, in the Gospel.

Just think about those two together for a minute. Simultaneously wellness can be seen as an invitation for others to come inward and our own departure outward.

That's because Christian wellness includes a commitment to moderation. Our Christian commitment of wellness includes a moderation of inward invitation and outward witness.

The same might be said of our commitment to our uncompromising commitment to Christ in the Lutheran theological tradition and our creative expressions of God's love through ministries like the Rough Draught Coffee House, Faith and Film, and Pub Theology. Greg Jones refers to this process as traditioned innovation, where we grow in new ways of sharing the Gospel even as we stay grounded in the traditions that gave rise to our faith. We see this in African American and indigenous expressions of Christianity that took a foreign faith, kept the core, and express it in their own unique ways. This mix of tradition and innovation is the moderation that produces wellness in the church.

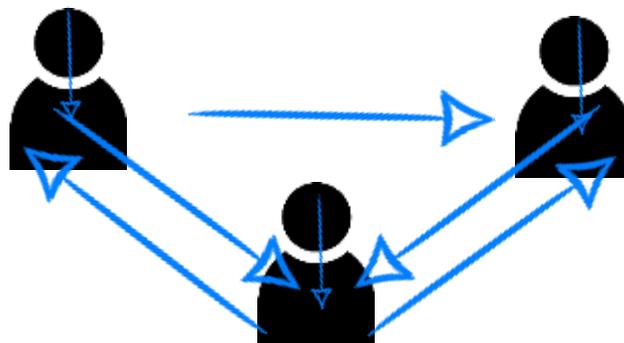
As we already talked about the communal importance of wellness, we might also recognize there's a need for

moderation in between our focus on ourselves and our focus on others. While we're not called to selfishness, we are called to care for our part of the Body of Christ with the same attentiveness we give to each other member, to ensure that we're healthy enough to live out the call God places upon our lives. We need to secure care for ourselves and to ensure that others get the care they receive as well. We're no good to one another if we're not well enough to play our part in the Body of Christ.

Now, this might not seem fair, for if we give the same attention to ourselves this means we spend more time on ourselves than we do on others. This might not seem healthy, or well. We need to remember that we're not called to be comfortable, but called to be well. Those are two very different things. More than that, though, let's just imagine the way this works out if we're all truly committed to wellness. If, as we seek wellness as a church, care more for



each other than we care for ourselves, look at the directions of these arrows. We may not care for ourselves as much as we would if we were on our own, but we open ourselves to the care offered by others. Those others might have skills to meet our needs in ways that we could never on our own, and they might have needs that only our skills can effectively meet. If we together as a church commit to wellness, both ourselves and others, there's potential to become healthier and stronger as we reflect God's goodness to the world.



Wellness, as we've said, is holding fast to what is good.
Here's the key for that,

friends. We have to hold fast to one another and what's best for one another because we're each God-given images. We're each intended to be bearers of God's goodness. Sin has gotten in the way of that, but if we're committed to wellness, that means we must be committed to a wellness that benefits everyone, not just ourselves. That's why, with wellness, we must challenge our society's acceptance of systemic racism as they continue to prevent wellness for people of color. We must challenge the biases that many carry toward mental illness treatment that prevents so many people from seeking wellness from counselors and psychiatrists. We must, in Paul's words, hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good. These are active things, things that we must do not just in our minds and hearts but with our decisions and actions.

And when we do this – when we commit to caring for others even more than we care for ourselves – look at how

many arrows are coming our way as well. Look at how much care we're receiving. It's at least as much as we're giving, if not more. A disposition that cares about wellness for others opens us become well as well. When we can admit our world needs changing, that sometimes we're holding fast to the wrong things, we can also open ourselves to the wellness that Christ offers. We find the refreshment for this journey here in the sacraments. Water that parches our thirsty souls with the sustenance of the Holy Spirit. Bread and wine that fill our bellies with the very presence of Jesus Christ. These, along with scripture, and our community, and very lives, are God's arrows of wellness and care directed at us. To become well, to hold fast to what is good, means to become more like Christ, and these are the resources at hand for that pursuit of wellness. That's what we're pursuing in all avenues of life, becoming who we're made to be: little

Christs, bearers of God's image, God's children that carry the Lord's DNA from this meal into the world.

To become well, friends, hold fast to what is good. And if you aren't sure whether it's good, ask one of these people around you. They too are seeking wellness in God's image.

Amen.