

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Mary Newberg Gale
Sunday, October 19, 2025

We're going to take some deep centering breaths before we turn to scripture. So, we take in deep breaths and we breathe in the mercies of God, and we breathe out God's mercies for the world. We breathe in the mercies of God. We breathe out God's mercies for everyone. We breathe in the mercies of God. and we breathe out God's mercy for the world.

Loving and faithful God, thank you for calling us together. Thank you for your spirit that moves in our lives to bring us to this place and this time. Open our hearts and our minds that we might hear your word anew, that it might poke us and challenge us and comfort us in ways that we need it the most, God. Prepare us once again to know the presence of your spirit here with us. Amen.

Today we are in the second of a three sermon series called growing in gratitude about how our lives are shaped by the generosity, grace and mercy of our God and then how those lives affect and engage in the world. So this morning we are turning to First Chronicles, which is not a book that I have ever preached on. It's not a book that comes up at all in the Revised Common Lectionary. So if you want to read along with me, I will let you know it is after First and Second Kings and before Ezra and Nehemiah in the Hebrew scriptures. Because the last time I read it was when I was in seminary and was required to. But we are looking at chapter 29 in First Chronicles starting with verse 10. Let's hear these words from our Hebrew ancestors.

Then David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly. David said, "Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, the majesty. For all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honor come from you and you rule over them all. In your hand are power and might. And it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. And now our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name. But who am I? And what is my people that we should be able to make this free will offering? For all things come from you, and of your own we have given you. For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all of our ancestors. Our days on the earth are like shadow and there is no hope. Oh Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.

Friends, these are the words of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

I shared just a moment ago that 1 Chronicles never appears in the Revised Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle that goes through the books of the Bible, so that, hopefully, you would have heard every book of the Bible at some point in worship in a three-year cycle, but not Chronicles, not either Chronicles, I believe. It is not a much read series of books. Between 1 and 2

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Mary Newberg Gale
Sunday, October 19, 2025

Chronicles in 64 chapters, it tells the story of the Israelite people from the creation of the world through the restoration after the Babylonian exile. That is the whole of the Hebrew scriptures. It does this very quickly in 64ish chapters because it focuses a lot on genealogies, particularly the genealogy and the dynasty of King David. Now I have shared and we have talked about one of the things that I think makes our Bible so strong, our scriptures so strong, is that throughout them we have multiple voices speaking. It's why we have four gospels. Many of them tell, in fact all of them tell, some of the same stories, but they tell it from their own perspective. They tell it from what their community was experiencing and what they saw and valued in the life of Jesus. The same is true in our Hebrew scriptures as well. We have books like Ruth, that stands in opposition to or opposition may be the wrong word. It stands in=yeah whatever the word I'm coming up with I don't know, I'm gonna say opposition, sorry, it stands in opposition to the books Ezra and Nehemiah, in Nehemiah particularly in relation to the role of outsiders in the community of Israel. Ezra and Nehemiah are books that are vehemently against anyone who was not of the Hebrew tradition. that could not trace themselves back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And they wanted them all removed from the community when they were rebuilding after the fall of Babylon or the fall of Jerusalem. Ruth talks, Ruth, who is a foreigner herself, tells a story of how a foreigner has an important and vital role in the community of Israel. So we have these juxtaposed voices both in the New Testament and in our Hebrew scriptures. And 1 and 2 Chronicles is another example of that because it basically tells the stories that are in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings from a different perspective. It tells them with a focus on King David, and they really give King David a glow up. They speak really fondly and big picture broadly about the good things that David and his descendants have done. Whereas in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, we get the good and the bad out of King David and his descendants.

So this today is David's farewell speech. It is the third of three farewell speeches he gives in 1 Chronicles. In 2 Chronicles, his son Solomon takes over as king. Now, these are the last words that David speaks in the book of Chronicles, and he is standing in front of the community that they have where they have gathered all of the supplies and all of the resources and everything that they're going to need to build this extravagant grand temple, this house for God that David has envisioned. and he is blessing the people and blessing this offering. And he's also really looking back through his life and the journey of the people of Israel and seeing that the single centralized thread is the presence, grace, and generosity of God. That's why he says repeatedly in our text, "All of this comes from you. We give you back of your own." So, we're getting a peek at a leader who is standing on the precipice of stepping aside, and he's looking backwards, and he's looking a little bit forwards at the same time, and he's focusing on God, and he's encouraging the people to do the same. I found this text curious as I spent some time with it this week because we frequently say, or at least I frequently say, in our call to confession or in our

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Mary Newberg Gale
Sunday, October 19, 2025

call to the offering something to the effect of “God is the author and source of all things. All that we have and all that we are come from you. Gracious gifts of you, God.” But how often do we actually act like that is true? That's part of what David is encouraging the people of Israel in this moment in our text. Like how often are those just words that they said or that we say? Because we believe them to be true. We honestly do. But we also then go and act in ways that center us as the one who is the driving force in our lives, the driving force in our community, that it is up to us. It is in our hands. King David is guilty of this very same thing. Multiple times in the story of the Hebrew scriptures, David tried to take control of his own destiny, and it never turned out well for him. Ever. So here, while he's looking backwards, his focus is maybe for the first time fully on God. So what does it mean for David and for us to embrace that shift to God as the source of all things, to truly rest in that shift that God is the author of all things? I believe it shifts our role in the world and in our community and in our own lives. It shifts how we understand things. It is a reorganizing and a recentering. Are any of you familiar with the phrase right sizing? You are. It, when we center God, it rightsizes us. It returns us to the appropriate size, the appropriate amount of space we are supposed to take up as human beings in this grand and vast creation that we can barely understand, because too often, as I said, we think we are the center of the universe as humans. I think that's a very human thing to do. But the continual call to return to God as the source helps to rightsize us, to put us in right relationship with God, which then changes how we live and move and have our being in the world. That is at once very freeing and very terrifying. It's heartwarming and it's hard. I've stood up before you, I mean, I've stood up there before you and said that about other texts before, because I believe it to be true about what a lot of God says in our scripture. It's that on one hand it is comfort and on the other hand it is challenge. So when we center God at the very basic level, it is a reminder that none of this, none of this, as beautiful as it is, is ours. None of what we have, none of this and none of that is ours. It is God's. It is not owned by us. We do not have to manage it. It's not up to us in the end. We are not the ones ultimately responsible for the fate of everything.

That is freeing and challenging because letting go even a little bit, the letting go of not being responsible for it is hard. That's why I'm very fond of the stories of the matriarchs and the patriarchs in our Hebrew scriptures because the scriptures talk about them as human beings. They make mistakes. They screw things up. Moses, David, Miriam, Sarah, Abraham, they don't do everything right. They often explicitly don't do what God has asked them to do. and they live with the consequences of those choices. But God never abandons them. We see the truth of that in King David. Like we see all of the good—that he united the two separate kingdoms of Israel who had been fighting for so long. He brings the ark into Jerusalem, making it the center of life for the Israelite people. He unifies them in vision and goal. And he also takes a whole lot of concubines against God's call. And he kills Uriah in battle. I say kills, that's not fair. He gets

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Mary Newberg Gale
Sunday, October 19, 2025

Uriah killed in battle in order to take Bathsheba, who was faithfully married to Uriah, as his own wife. There is all of the good and all of the bad present there. All of what it means to be a human present in King David. And I think that's helpful to us, at least it's helpful to me, because, frankly, we are humans and no matter how hard we try to make God the center of everything in every aspect and in every moment, no matter how hard we try to set our own ego aside and center God, we're going to mess it up because we're not perfect. But God never abandons us. God doesn't leave us when we mess it up, because our life and the journey of faith is this delicate push and pull, this balancing act where we get some of it right and we get some of it wrong. And at least in my life, I would say like King David, hindsight always makes the thread of God's presence clearer. Like David, when we're looking backwards through things, we can see more of God's handiwork. We've talked about how sometimes when you're in the midst of something, when you are struggling, when you have a tough decision to make or you're worried about what's coming next or the world is the world, and it's hard and it's heavy, it's hard to feel God's presence with you. And that push and that drive and that fear that pushes us to take control gets stronger and stronger and stronger. And sometimes it's only when you're looking back over the road that you can say, "Oh, that God was there in all of that. God was with me the whole time."

But I think what's important for us and what I want you to dream with me today is what if rather than only looking for God in hindsight, we try our best to center God here and now. What would it look like if we're able to shift our vision to try and be aware of those guiding threads of God in these moments? What happens if we're able to unclench our hands and we are able to hold things gently...even when we're scared, even when we're sad, even when we're lonely. I think the text from David tells David, David, I'm just going to call him Davis like he's my old friend. The text from David says tells us two things that can give us an idea of what it might be like if we were able to hold things gently and to be open to the presence of God in our lives. David says specifically that the Israelites, "who are we to have brought this bounty before you? For we are only aliens and transients."

Now, it is important for us to keep in mind, we might have heard that language before, aliens and transients in our Hebrew scripture. Or maybe you're more familiar with the widow, orphan, and alien in your midst. Because multiple times throughout our Hebrew scriptures, God exhorts the people of Israel to care for the widow, the orphan, and the alien in their midst. Typically, alien and transient refers to nonIsraelites. And because widows, orphans, and aliens in your midst did not own land, in landbased societies, that meant they were completely dependent upon the people of Israel for everything, for shelter, for food, for nurture. And so God's consistent calling to care for them throughout the Hebrew scriptures is about creating community where all are welcome. So David's language before this gathered assembly says forcefully that there is no in and out.

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Mary Newberg Gale
Sunday, October 19, 2025

There is no us and them. There is just God's people. Now, that would have been a shocking statement for the people of Israel to hear about themselves—that they were transients and aliens before God like their ancestors were. That every single one of us is a transient in God's community, that God has brought in and that God provides for. And those are powerful, powerful words when we think about what it means to center God and to hold things loosely, because it means that every single one of us, every child of God is a refugee who has been welcomed by God into community. And what applies to us applies to all, that all boundaries, all dividing lines, all of the things that the world puts on people and that separate us, none of them come from God and none of them carry weight for us when we are making God the center of our lives. We are all wandering pilgrims in front of our God. David also says “in your hand (repeatedly) he says in your hand is power and might, in your hand is abundance and growth.” That's why I keep doing this in the sermon. In your hands, God.

We exist in a world that overvalues in my opinion, power and might. And we're used to hearing about God's power and might as a way to reorient ourselves from the power and might of the world, the way the world understands power and might to the way God, our creator, understands power and might. But for David to tie power and might to the abundance of God, the abundance that God holds in God's hands for all of us, for all of creation, is a powerful word about how we vision ourselves and our role partaking of God's abundance. It speaks directly against what I would argue is a uniquely American concept of the prosperity gospel, that “God has blessed me because I am good enough. And anyone who doesn't have as much as me must have done something to overturn their relationship with God and has no bearing on me. That is, that is on them. But I have been richly blessed. “ And the blessing is always categorized in things in the wealth and trappings of the world. But David says in our text today and our scriptures say throughout the Old and New Testaments that God holds massive abundance for all.

That helps when we are centering God because it helps put ourselves in the receptive position of what God is offering us and what God is calling us to be and do in the world. Because the blessings of abundance don't just stop with receiving it and receiving welcoming from God. God calls us to share that abundance and to share that welcome with all. That's the word that King David is giving his people. It's the word that God speaks to us even now. That accepting ourselves where we are and opening ourselves to the movement of God's spirit in our life is a central piece of centering God as the source of our being. It is recognizing that we welcome, we care, we nurture, we serve, we love because God first loved us. God first nurtured us. God first cared for us, and God has given us the bandwidth and the ability to share those things that we have received.

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Mary Newberg Gale
Sunday, October 19, 2025

This day, friends, let us be ever thankful for the God that is the source of all of our being. The God that feeds us and nurtures us and exhorts us to share the love and the mercy and grace that we have received with the entirety of God's creation, this day and all days. Amen.