

Introduction at the beginning of the service:

At the end of the year, it seems like everyone takes time to look back on what kind of year it was. Everywhere you turn you see top 10 lists for 2010. 10 best songs of 2010. 10 best movies. 10 most visited websites. 10 most-watched YouTube videos. The lists are everywhere. Tonight in our worship services we will also look back at 2010 and make list. How about a list of God's blessings? Well, that list would be way too long, so let's narrow the scope. How about this: "Top ways God blessed us in his Church in 2010." I would suggest this list is the most important one, because it's more than a matter of trivia (as the other lists are.) It's cause for praising God. Look at how he's blessed us in the church this year! Praise his holy name! We sing: **Hymn #69, 1-3**

Prayer of the Day: Almighty and eternal Lord God, you speak, and by the word of your mouth worlds are created and preserved, sinners are justified and forgiven, and faith is born and renewed. Grant us in this hour a deep and honest awe for all the mercies we have received from your hand through the power and grace of your Word. Receive from our lips a high and noble hymn of praise. Especially do we thank you that during this past year you have proclaimed your salvation through the ministry of our congregation. Hear now our thanks and praise this evening. Strengthen our resolve and our commitment to remain faithful to you and to be eager to serve you and your people all our days. We come to you through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

PART 1: "Through His Word" INTRO: The first way God has blessed us in his church this past year was through His Word. In the past year, I counted 66 distinct worship services conducted here at Good Shepherd. In every one of those services, the word of God was read and the Word of God was explained and expounded upon for your edification. 66 times God spoke to your heart. He convicted you of your sin and disobedience. He comforted you with the assurance of your forgiveness. 66 times you heard about Jesus' holiness, and his innocent death on

the cross for your sins. 66 times, the Holy Spirit was strengthening your faith and drawing you closer to God almighty. Wow, we have been blessed, haven't we? Praise God for the Word proclaimed in his church during the past year... and look forward to the 66 or so occasions coming up in 2011 to grow in your relationship with the God who made you and saved you!

The first reading is found in **Psalms 119:97-112**. With these words, found in the Word, we praise God for his Word!

"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws. I have suffered much; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your word. Accept, O LORD, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws. Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your law. The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts. Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end."

INTRO: Let me ask you this. Did you really come all 66 times and hear the Word of God? Is his Word the top priority in your daily life? Our Lord Jesus reminds us about our priorities when it comes to his word in the next reading.

Luke 10:38-42 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried

and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

PART 2 “With Music”: Also in the past year, God has blessed us richly through music in his church. Martin Luther said about music: “Music is an endowment and a gift of God, not a gift of men. It also drives away the devil and makes people cheerful; one forgets all anger, unchasteness, pride and other vices. I place music next to theology and give it the highest praise. And we see how David and all saints put their pious thoughts into verse, rhyme and songs because music reigns in times of peace.” Good Shepherd is blessed with many musicians to edify our worship. The regular organists especially give generously of their time. Be sure to thank them! They are Barb Baumann, Darin Larsen and Joanna Hafner. So many others have blessed us with their God-given musical abilities that we can’t name them all now. Our worship has been edified with choirs, soloists, childrens choirs, trumpet, oboe, clarinet, and much more.

Music is an important part of praise as Psalm 149 reminds us:

Psalm 149:1-6 Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths.

The Lutheran church has been called, “The singing church.” The majority of the hymns, songs and psalms are sung, not by a trained professional, or the pastor, or a cantor. They are sung by the congregation. Joining our voices in praise to our God is an important part of worship. Listen to the next reading in

Colossians 3:12-17 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness,

humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

PART 3 “In Baptisms”: Baptism is a means of grace... one of the instruments used by the Holy Spirit to create and strengthen faith in a person’s heart. This past year a total of 5 people were washed clean of their sins and connected to Jesus through Holy Baptism.

Jesus commanded baptism before he ascended:

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

But we dare never say “I was baptized” as if it something that happened in the past, but isn’t important today. Instead say, “I AM baptized!” We received daily strength and motivation for godly living through our baptisms! The next reading reminds us of this:

Romans 6:1-4 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

PART 4 “In the Lord’s Supper”: INTRO:

During the past year, we celebrated the Lord’s Supper at least 26 times. Over 2,000 times individuals have lined up right here to receive the Lord’s very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Through this sacrament, the Lord has strengthened our faith time and again. We have received here the Lord’s very body given on the cross for our sins. We drank his very blood which was shed for the guilt of every last one of our sins. Time and again, we left this altar with the words: “Depart in peace. Your sins ARE forgiven.” Rich blessings from the Lord! We’re reminded of the importance of the Lord’s Supper in:

1 Corinthians 11:23-29 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

In this holy supper we are one with Christ as we participate in his body and blood. But we are also one with each other in the body of Christ. We express our unity when we commune together. This we hear in:

1 Corinthians 10:15-17 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because

there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

PART 5 “For 61 years of Grace at Good Shepherd”: INTRO:

Finally we remember that the blessings we have received here over the last year are great, this year wasn’t unique. These exact same blessings have been received by God’s people here over the past 61 years. In those years, many, many members have passed from this world of sorrows into eternal glory. Having been blessed by God for years in his church, the received what was promised: the salvation of their souls. We especially remember the two members who went to be with the Lord this past year: Leatha Mortensen and Chris Christensen.

Finally, this is what Good Shepherd is all about... preparing souls for eternity. Through the Gospel in Word and sacrament, which, praise be to God our church has and uses faithfully, we are ready to stand before the holy God. The blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from our sins. And our church family has helped us stay strong in this faith. For this, we surely must praise God! We do so with the words of:

Psalms 150 Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

In the final reading, our God speaks to us and encourages to recognize and hold on to what we have. What an honor and privilege to have his powerful word of truth. We are weak but he is strong. Here these words of encouragement:

Revelation 3:7-13 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you

an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Friends, don't take for granted the tremendous, eternal blessings God has showered upon you in his church during the past year! Praise his name for the things we have talked about today. And look forward with eager anticipation to the continued amazing blessings you will receive in God's church in 2011! Amen.