“Continuing the Celebration”
Psalm 148

I.  Introduction:

Merry Christmas! I hope that everyone had a wonderful Christmas and you were able to enjoy every moment amongst what I assume has been a busy week. There was one Christmas when the Grinch came to visit our family and I had really forgotten about it until recently. I woke up one Christmas morning to find a police officer standing in our home. My family lived in a quiet, safe neighborhood so, seeing a police officer in your home was not a usual occurrence. My grandparents didn’t usually spend the night on Christmas Eve, but that year they did. They went to church with us to hear us sing in the youth and children’s choirs. During the night, while we all were dreaming of Christmas someone had broken into my grandparent’s car and had stolen all of our Christmas gifts out of the backseat. Surprisingly they did not open the trunk, where my gifts were stored. My sisters and parents had nothing to open on Christmas morning and I felt so guilty that mine were now sitting under the tree.

As shocking as this all was, it did not stop our Christmas celebration, after the officer left we continued with our celebration as if nothing had happened. We opened the presents that Santa had left us, we shared in a meal together and we celebrated Christmas as a family. Christmas cannot be stolen from you, just because the gifts are no longer there. A few hours later our gifts were found thrown along the street and found in the adjoining neighborhood, but it didn’t matter because Christmas was within us and the circumstances couldn’t change the joy in our hearts and the love that surrounded our family table that Christmas morning.
II. What happens after the story ends?

We have spent Advent reading through the story of the Grinch Who Stole Christmas and last week the story ended with the Grinch being welcomed into the Who community. After lying to little Cindy Loo Who and stealing all of the towns presents, food and decoration he is welcomed to sit at the head of the table without any question.

Something that I have wondered is if Dr. Seuss had written a follow up book, what would the relationship of the Grinch and the Who’s be after Christmas? Would he still be part of the community, would the local real estate agent help the Grinch find the perfect home in Whoville to become part of this community or after the roast beast had been consumed and presents opened would the Grinch quietly slip away back into his cave with poor little Max?

That’s the thing about Christmas, sometimes after the presents are unwrapped and once the decorations are all tucked back into storage we just move on. We no longer dwell on the excitement and the magic of Christmas, we move on with our daily lives with new sweaters and toys being the only remaining sign of the holiday that we spent 4 weeks or more waiting to happen. It’s so easy to do so, we feel that once Christmas is over we can finally settle back in our routine until next year when we do it all over again.

I would like to imagine that the Who’s selfless behavior and act of unwavering hospitality didn’t end after Christmas dinner was over, but that they welcomed the Grinch into the community to stay. They served as his neighbors, maybe helped to watch Max, or invited the Grinch to the community barbeque. All of this done because of the relationship built around that table, we don’t know why the Grinch was ostracized from the community originally, but what we can assume is that around that table they had conversations about who the Grinch
was, and for the Grinch who the Who’s were, their history and their stories. Over that meal, that hopefully they built a relationship that would last much longer than the leftovers from that meal.

III. Continuing to give thanks, praise and serve

How can we do the same? How can we remember the relationships, conversations and good done during this Christmas season and continue it well into the coming year. Everything that we did during Advent was to praise God, to give thanks for this miraculous child that would come to us, in a dirty, dingy stable. The Psalm this morning is an exuberant song of praise, like the noises made by joyful chorus’ during the past month from children to adults, this psalm is for the entire world to celebrate the Lord. The Hebrew expression Hallelu-yah is the central refrain for this psalm, praising God for all things that shape our lives on this earth from the sun and moon, to the people of the world to the mountains, hills and animals that fill it. Hallelujah is part of our vocabulary especially during this season of Christmas. Hallelujah the song written by Leonard Cohen in 1984 has been performed by various artists and made famous through movies and radio, but this Christmas a video began circulating through social media YouTube of this famous song re-written to tell the Christmas story. The lyrics read:

I've heard about this baby boy
Who's come to earth to bring us joy
And I just want to sing this song to you
It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth
The minor fall, the major lift
With every breath I'm singing Hallelujah
Hallelujah

A couple came to Bethlehem

Expecting child, they searched the inn

To find a place for You were coming soon

There was no room for them to stay

So in a manger filled with hay

God's only Son was born, oh Hallelujah

Hallelujah

The shepherds left their flocks by night

To see this baby wrapped in light

A host of angels led them all to You

It was just as the angels said

You'll find Him in a manger bed

Immanuel and Savior, Hallelujah

Hallelujah

A star shown bright up in the east

To Bethlehem, the wisemen three

Came many miles and journeyed long for You

And to the place at which You were

Their frankincense and gold and myrrh

They gave to You and cried out Hallelujah

Hallelujah
I know You came to rescue me

This baby boy would grow to be

A man and one day die for me and you

My sins would drive the nails in You

That rugged cross was my cross, too

Still every breath You drew was Hallelujah

Hallelujah

Praise God, Hallelujah and shout for joy for this baby who has been born, to bring us so much salvation and joy. Let them praise his name, the name of the Lord. Our hearts have sung this tune in preparation and now it is time to continue our praise and singing, but how?

Did you know? That this year the angels on the angel tree went faster than last year? This year we had the same number of angels, but there was no need to send out a churchwide email begging for angels to be adopted, but that on the second Sunday that the tree was up 150 children were taken off the trees and shopped for. The counselors from the schools were overwhelmed when they picked up the packages carefully wrapped for children we will never meet.

Did you know? That when the group went out to the Nest to set up for the Reindeer shop during the advent small groups that the task was already complete. So, instead of calling it quits and going home they went out and bought toddler coats for the children.
Did you know? That we had countless people check in on our shut-ins singing Christmas carols, and sharing conversation and holiday joy. And that our children have been collecting toiletries and other supplies for children and mothers at the Nest.

These are just a few ways that our members were reaching out to our community during the holiday season, shouting from the mountain tops praising God for the gift of Jesus, for the gift that was brought us each and every one of us. What an amazing time of the year to be part of this community. BUT! It can’t stop, we cannot forget that there are always ways that we can praise God through serving one another. It is so easy to give of ourselves during Christmas, the opportunities are always right in front of our faces and it’s easy to remember the importance of giving thanks and giving back during this time of year. God’s Pantry is inundated with volunteers during Christmas and Thanksgiving, but short volunteers to sort and pack food during many times of the year when it is not in our heads to go out and volunteer. I do not want to downplay all of the work that we have done the last month, let us give thanks and praise for all of the lives that have been touched and served through this congregation, but how can we make sure that Christmas is lived out in February, April, and every other month. Local Outreach will be beginning to offer service projects throughout the year to help us to live out the Christmas spirit. Let us work together as community to remind each other of the spirit of Christmas that is alive during this season, and to continue to strive to share it year round.
IV. How can we continue Christmas?

Christmas is not over based on our calendar and Christmas should not be over in our hearts. Let us Praise the Lord! Let us shout Hallelujah, let us praise this small baby who came to serve each of us, who loved us unconditionally and then died for each and every one of us. Let us praise together, young and old, long time members and first time friends to think of how we can continue this blessing of Christmas. The Who’s welcomed the Grinch in an overwhelming act of hospitality, without question they welcomed him to the table and into their community.

Let us be the Who’s that extend our community to the Grinch well after the leftovers have been eaten, let us praise God in caring for creation and caring for the community that surrounds us. Our faith has been transformed through the birth of a small child, who brought lowly shepherds and kings together to worship him, let us continue to praise all that has been revealed to us in this magical season and to not let it end because the story is not over. Jesus has just been born, we are still awaiting all that he will do and all of the ways that he will serve and in that time of waiting let us continue Christmas together.