Pray. How did prayer factor into your life in 2017? For what will you need to pray for in 2018? What does your prayer life look like? Would you benefit from finding a prayer partner? Remember to pray to the One who is waiting to hear from you.

*Worship*. Psalm 148 is all about giving God worship. You can give God praise anytime, anywhere. As God’s people, we give God praise during worship where we invite the Spirit’s help, we connect with the community of faith, we read Scripture, and we pray together. Make it a point to worship with us in 2018.

If you are willing to faithfully apply these spiritual practices, you will find your rock moved in some surprising and wonderful ways. So, one final question: Are you willing to have God move your rock? Are you willing to do the things necessary to open your life to the Spirit’s promptings? Are you ready to make the next step of Christian discipleship?

While God isn’t physically visible, the way God affects people is. The movement of God can be as clear as the movement of boulders in a dry lakebed. Psalm 148 helps us see how God moved us in the past and how God can move us in the year ahead. It is God who moves us. We recognize that. We praise God for it.

Prayer: We gather to praise you O God, for all the things we can see, and sometimes understand: the sun, moon and stars; the clouds and changing weather. We gather to praise you, O God, for all the things that we cannot see or understand: all heaven’s angels, outer space; and the skies above us. We gather to praise you O God, for all the things in life that we experience: the created world, people of all ages and circumstances, all God’s creations. We join in their eternal chorus of praise to God: whose name is glorious, and whose ways are holy. Amen.

**Sources:**

* On “mystery spots” and “gravity hills”: http:/paranormal.about.com/library/weekly/aa120301a.htm.
* On the moving rocks of Racetrack Playa: http://geology.com/articles/racetrack-playa-sliding-rocks.shtml; youtube.com/watch?v=u1hoiHvOeGc.

**What Moves Your Rock?**

Sunday, December 31, 2017 Psalm 148

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

This is the “First Sunday After Christmas.” The anticipation of Advent is behind us. The joy and memories of Christmas Day are behind us. Now it’s the first Sunday after Christmas...a Sunday named for what is no longer. But we should take care not to skip lightly over this Sunday or to miss the opportunity it offers us. This is the last Sunday before the New Year: a time when most of us are reflecting on 2017 and looking forward to 2018. As such, I’d like to encourage your reflection with this question: What moves your rock?

Ok, obviously, a little back story is required. In California’s Death Valley, a giant dry lake bed known as Racetrack Playa is the site of an interesting natural phenomenon. It’s an utterly barren wasteland of a place. Apart from rare rainstorms during the summer and winter, the playa remains an arid, wind-swept mud flat. No vegetation survives in the lake bed and there are no signs of animal life, but strangely, there’s a lot of movement.

In something out of The X-Files or Ghostbusters, the giant rocks that dot the lake bed are sliding around the perfectly flat valley. Yes, that’s right, the rocks are moving! No human has seen or captured on film evidence of these rocks in motion. There are no human or animal tracks surrounding the rocks to indicate that some creature pushed them. Yet there are straight, curved and even zigzagged ruts in the dried mud which unmistakably indicate that these several-hundred-pound boulders moved from one location to another. [Show pics…]

Called “sailing rocks,” the notion of 500-pound sliding rocks is way out of our ordinary, human experience. Trying to explain this phenomenon is the realm of pure speculation. UFO bloggers and paranormal abnormals are all geeked-out about what — or who — is turning Racetrack Playa into an intergalactic Zen rock garden. But science offer much more probable explanations than interference by Yoda or E.T. or ALF or Marvin the Martian.

Geologists speculate that during the rare rainstorms which soak the lake bed, the surface mud becomes slick enough for the 90+ mph winds to slide the rocks along the temporarily low-friction surface. Other scientists suggest that the winds and the freezing desert nights create a thin layer of ice, turning the 1/4-inch-deep rainwater runoff into an ice slick that the rocks move across. Either of these theories is a micro-version of glaciation — the slow process by which giant ice glaciers expand, contract, shape valleys and move sediment along. It was a process of discovery, but geologists eventually hypothesized what moved these Death Valley rocks.

The question for this “First Sunday After Christmas,” and this last Sunday of 2017, is: What moves your rock? What moved it last year? What’s going to move it next year? (Okay, that’s three questions, but it’s the same basic idea.)

There are invisible and supernatural forces at work in shaping each of our worlds. These range from our human emotions, thoughts and motivations to the divine movements of the Holy Spirit or even the subtle, evil intentions of the devil himself. Psalm 148 provides a great jumping-off point for recognizing that God is the invisible force who’s moving our worlds. And as we recognize God at work in our life, we give God praise.

Psalm 148 is a progression of praise given to God. Starting with the heavens and the heavenly host (vv. 1-4), then moving down to earth (vv. 7-9), its creatures (vv. 7-10), all of humanity (vv. 11-12), and finally the people of God (v. 14): the whole created order is united in exalting God.

While we are not God’s chosen people Israel (as cited in this psalm), we are God’s people, “[God’s] faithful” and those “close to [God]” (v. 14). It’s our purpose and privilege to praise God. Praise is one of the reasons God created us, but when the faithful won’t praise God, Jesus announces that “the stones will shout out” (Luke 19:40). We all thought rocks just sat there; but apparently, they can slide and sing praise to God.

Praise is God’s right, as the Creator of everything, but the rocks should never be left to do our job for us. Nor should we rely on the sea creatures or the birds or the mountains or the stars to praise God on our behalf. Implicit in this psalm is the great exhortation to give God thanks and praise for all God’s blessings to us. So, let me ask you: looking back on 2017, for what are you thankful? How has God blessed you this past year? For what should you give God praise? [Shout-outs from the congregation…]

The start of the new year is traditionally the time to make resolutions. Lose weight. Exercise more. Work less. Read more. Eat less. Spend more time with the kids. Spend less money. Put something away for retirement. Go back to school. Change jobs. We set goals on how to live better moving forward. I once heard a cynic state that resolutions are the “to do” list for the first week of January! Unfortunately, it’s all-too-true: our resolutions rarely live long into the new year. We get tired or bored or discouraged with our resolutions, and we give up on them.

But when it comes to our spiritual resolutions, we shouldn’t be so quick to give up or abandon them. After all, our hope is not in the new year itself; our hope is in the One who makes all things new. To improve our spiritual health in the new year, we might look to some of the spiritual practices that guide us and move us. We need to remember what – or Who - will move our rock!

Invite the Spirit’s help. Jesus said: “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Ask where the Holy Spirit is convicting you of a needed life change in 2018, and invite the Spirit to help you make that change. This is a resolution infused with redemption.

Connect with the Community of Faith. All followers of Jesus should have a group of people around them whom they know and are known by, care for and are cared for by, challenge and are challenged by. Join a Bible study. Serve on a committee. Pitch in on a mission project. Volunteer with our youth. Give to the ministries of the congregation. Consider how you intend to allow giving and receiving from community to shape you in 2018.

Read the Scriptures. In the Bible, God tells us what God expects of us and shows us how to live as God’s people. Ask what you want to learn about God. What parts of the Bible do you want to better understand and live? What truths do you want to shape their 2018?