

Thanks!  
Psalm 92:1-4  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
November 24, 2019  
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

For what are you grateful?

Sometimes we just need to make a little list, to name aloud the things and people and experiences in our lives that cause us to say, “Thank you!” Sometimes we just name things – simple pleasures and deep meaningful moments – that make us grateful. In fact, Meister Eckhart, a 13<sup>th</sup> century German theologian, philosopher and mystic, is quoted as saying, “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, that will be enough.”

Sit with that for a minute. Thank you is a big enough prayer, that someone claimed it could be our only prayer.

But, Meister Eckhart didn’t just invent the idea that gratitude is important. Our faith claims it as well. The psalm we read this morning begins, “It is good to give thanks to the Lord...” and with a quick glimpse at a concordance I found that at least 22 other psalms use the words thanks or thankful.

The Bible says gratitude is important. A 13<sup>th</sup> century mystic embraced it as the most important prayer. And even today our culture knows the importance of gratitude. Just this week I went onto Amazon.com and did a search in books for gratitude journals and got over 50,000 results! Yes, 50,000!

Why is saying thanks, being grateful, rooting ourselves in gratitude so important?

Why is responding to kindnesses with the words, “Thank you,” one of the first things we teach our children?

Maybe it’s because gratitude connects us with others.

In the book *Say Please, Say Thank You*, Donald McCullough writes, “if I’m too busy to take five minutes to acknowledge a gift...I’m not simply in danger of Miss Manners hauling me in before the court of public opinion and throwing the book of etiquette at me, I’m just too busy for my own good and the world’s too. If I always move forward to the next task on my agenda without pausing to look back in gratitude to the good things I have been given, I allow my almighty self-importance to blind me to the truth of things: [that] I am completely dependent on others, and every achievement of ‘mine’ has been won through a team effort.”<sup>1</sup>

Gratitude reminds us that we are not in this alone. Gratitude gives us pause to realize how many, many people make a difference in our lives.

Gratitude also gives us, “however fleeting and brief, a moment of contentment.”<sup>2</sup> It causes us to “just be” in the midst of our lives and to recognize the goodness of what surrounds us. It gives us pause to stop achieving and clamoring for something else, for more accumulation, for more praise, and gratitude simply asks us to appreciate what we already have.

And perhaps these two things alone help us understand why our relationship with gratitude is mixed. After all, clearly we believe in it – we teach it to our children, the stock of books on Amazon alone says that we long to be grateful. And yet, while gratitude connects us with others and causes us to be content, we also participate (often too willingly) in a world built on the fallacy of the self-made person and on the desire to keep getting and buying and accumulating more.

And while gratitude is not meant to be saved for the month of November or the holiday of Thanksgiving, this time does give us a good chance to pause and to reorient ourselves, to

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<sup>1</sup> Donald McCullough, *Say Please, Say Thank You – The Respect We Owe Each Other* (New York: Perigee Books, 1998), 18.

<sup>2</sup> McCullough, 19.

recommit to living from a place of gratitude. After all, the next holiday on our calendars is the one where we have habits of overspending, and of giving and receiving so many things that we don't need, don't have room for and won't even use.

So, what better time than now to pause...not only to say thank you...but to choose to live in a mode of thankfulness? What better time than now to make a commitment to not only teach our children to say the words "thank you" but to choose together as families to live from a place of connection and contentment, a place where maybe, just maybe, conversations and experiences shared together could start to replace screen time and overflowing closets. And what better time than now to re-root our relationship with God in gratitude as we pause with intention to realize and remember the many ways and places where God is showing up for us, ways and places we all too often walk right by.

And there is something else about gratitude. Not only does it connect us to God and each other. Not only does it nurture contentment in us. But gratitude also causes us to be generous. After all gratitude isn't just a passive feeling...it isn't even just about taking the time to handwrite a thank you note...but gratitude is a call to action, it moves us to next step.

In her book *Help, Thanks, Wow*, Anne Lamott writes, "Gratitude...almost always makes you willing to be of service, which is where the joy resides. It means you are willing to stop being such a jerk. When you are aware of all that has been given to you, in your lifetime and in the past few days, it is hard not to be humbled, and pleased to give back."<sup>3</sup> "Saying and meaning 'Thanks' leads to a crazy thought: What more can I give?"<sup>4</sup>

Maybe Meister Eckhart was right. Maybe thank you, even if it is the only words we ever pray, is enough. Because whether we say it until we mean it...whether we feel it and then learn

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<sup>3</sup> Anne Lamott, *Help, Thanks, Wow – The Three Essential Prayers* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012), 56-7.

<sup>4</sup> Lamott, 62,

to say it...whichever comes first in the proverbial chicken and egg question – gratitude makes us better. When we have the discipline of saying thank you then that means that even just for a moment we are noticing...noticing the others in our lives who make a difference, noticing all that we have, noticing our connection. And when we notice, when we acknowledge God's presence with us and the presence of other people as well...when we acknowledge that our life is not ours alone but that we are dependent upon others...when we acknowledge that we have so very much, so much more than we need, so much we can share...then we become better humans and we create a better world.

It is good that each year we have this holiday called Thanksgiving. It is good that each year a day is carved out for us to be grateful. But, what would happen if we chose for it not to be just a day, but maybe a series of days, of weeks, of months...what if we chose to make a commitment that gratitude would be our foundation for living? What would happen? How would we be different? How would the world be changed?

“Thanks!” It is a powerful prayer. And if we are open to it – it just might change us. And before we know it, with gratitude and in partnership with God, we just might change the world.

Amen.