From Gratitude to Action
Psalm 103:1-5 and Matthew 25:35-40
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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It is easy to say thank you.

We teach young children…they repeat it before they necessarily even know what it means. And that has benefits. Saying “thank you” is the first step to helping us identify gratitude. Sometimes we practice something before we fully embrace or understand it. So we say “thank you” and over time we learn when this is appropriate and what it means.

And beyond saying, “thank you,” we could even say that it is easy to *feel* gratitude. I suspect we all know that feeling of something welling up inside us when someone has been kind, when a situation has ended in a surprisingly delightful conclusion, when an unexpected gift comes our way…that feeling we come to recognize and identify as gratitude.

And this week, with Thanksgiving on the horizon, we might be even more attuned to gratitude than usual.

But saying “thank you” and even feeling grateful, those are really just the starting points.

Because our challenge, our invitation, is to allow that gratitude to fill us so that it might change us and shape us and create us into people who are different because of it.

And part of how that happens is by letting our gratitude be more than a word we say out of duty, more even than a temporary feeling. Rather we are invited to let gratitude be a position from which we live.

The psalm we read earlier today began, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and *all that is within me*, bless his holy name.” This psalm of thanksgiving begins not with an easy, “thank you,” but with the conviction that gratitude is about our whole selves.

Because *living from* gratitude is different than saying “thank you” or even having episodes of being grateful that are dependent on the situation.

When we live from gratitude, we live from a different perspective.

And, let’s be clear, living from gratitude doesn’t mean we have to be thankful for everything. There are some terrible things in this world and in our lives; we can still, in fact we need to, acknowledge that. But when we live from gratitude we have the perspective to be grateful - not *for* all things, but *in* all things.

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Do you hear that difference?

We don't have to be thankful for a tragedy that has happened. But when we live from gratitude it helps us be able to be thankful even in the midst of that experience… thankful perhaps for God's companionship, or for the support of people around us, or for the resources we have to deal with a difficult situation.

When we live from a perspective of gratitude, it also helps us to see what is real and to know what is enough. Therefore it is difficult to live from gratitude and greed at the same time. After all, gratitude gives us the ability to experience love and joy, hope and connection. And when we live that way, then instincts within us or voices around us that point us toward fear and greed are challenged.

And what that means is that when we are grateful, when gratitude fills our whole being, then it points us outside ourselves and motivates us toward action.

Because when we are grateful we are more likely to live with intentional connection.

When we are grateful we can more easily acknowledge that we are all interdependent.

When we are grateful we can see the possibilities rather than getting stuck in limitations.

When we are grateful, humility is an outgrowth of our gratitude and humility and gratitude together help us to be more generous.

When we live from a position of gratitude, then it becomes the fire within us that moves us to work for change for others.

See, these two passages of scripture we read today may at first have seemed disconnected. But perhaps they are deeply connected.

In fact, if we had kept reading further into the psalm, in that section that begins in verse 2 about remembering who God is, we would hear that God is one who works "justice for all who are oppressed" (Psalm 103:6, NRSV).

It is not accidental that in the gospels, just like in Jewish law, Jesus affirms again and again care for the hungry, the marginalized, the lonely, the oppressed. Because these are people God cares for, too.

And if we are people who live from generosity rather than greed, from possibility rather than limitations, from gratitude rather than indifference, from love rather than fear, then how can we not also respond to the needs of our neighbors?

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And when we are living from the perspective of gratitude, then it is more likely that we, like the people in Matthew's parable, will not even recognize that when we care for our neighbors we are also caring for Christ himself.

After all, as grateful people, that's not our motivation. Because gratitude helps us move beyond accolades, helps us move beyond needing to be recognized or to get credit. It helps us move to a position of genuine care for those around us no matter who they are.

In Matthew's parable, Jesus says, "I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25:35-36, NRSVUE).

And we know the rest of the story. The people who did those things are confused because they didn't see Jesus. And our reading concluded with Jesus saying this, "I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me" (Matthew 25:40, NRSVUE).

When we are grateful, when we recognize that we are not self-made but in fact are dependent upon God and others, when we live not with a greed that hoards everything for ourselves but with a generosity that knows that the well-being of our neighbor matters to our well-being…then how can we not care for those around us?

When we live from gratitude, then it not only becomes easier, but becomes instinctive to care for our neighbors…to feed, to cloth, to house, to visit, to listen, to love.

Gratitude. It's more than a feeling. It is a perspective that motivates us to action. May we live gratefully and in doing so, may we build a world of care for all of God's children. Amen.

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