



## **“Giving Thanks”**

Reflection: November 22, 2020

The Rev. Paige Getty

One of my core principles as a pastor—also as a friend and spouse and parent—is that I will not insist that others look on the bright side or acknowledge silver linings when they’re having a hard time. Sadness, grief, anger, resentment, and even despair are legitimate responses to life experience, and they deserve their time and attention without anyone—and especially not those who aren’t experiencing the same thing—dismissing those feelings as unnecessary or wrong or unjustified.

I have a very negative visceral response anytime I witness one person saying to another, “Don’t cry.” or “Well, at least you have \_\_\_\_\_, even though you lost \_\_\_\_\_.” or “God is in control and wouldn’t give you anything you can’t handle.” or “Your deceased loved one is in a better place.” Not only do I believe that it’s inappropriate to dictate another person’s feelings, those phrases also violate my belief in empathy as a core value.

And.

It is also true that I have experienced the value in my own life of deliberately seeking and naming things for which I am grateful. Not *instead of* feeling anger and sadness and grief and worry, but as a companion to those... As a reminder to myself that whatever I’m currently feeling or experiencing, it does not represent my existence completely.

Sometimes I refuse. I’m just feeling too raw or irritable to even make an effort to be grateful, so I wallow for a bit, maybe reach out to a trusted confidant and express my frustration or sadness or snark, and for a time I avoid seeking out any meaningful aspect of my outburst.



Later, of course, I'm likely to acknowledge my gratitude for having the outlets to express myself.

The fact is that, even when I'm feeling the most weary and overwhelmed by the ills of the world, by fear and anxiety, but sorrow or betrayal, acknowledging a blessing lifts a little of the weight of burden, helping me to feel more equipped to continue forward.

This is why in our family we have a gratitude ritual at our dinner table. Graham and I both were raised in families where someone said grace before supper each evening—in my family, we recited the rhyming “God is great, God is good...” ditty—and we have chosen not to do that. Instead, each of us names a single thing for which we're grateful that day. And I do insist that everyone participate, as occasionally there's resistance “because I can't think of anything”. (I strive to be empathetic, but I'm also the parent who says you can feel your feelings AND name a single thing of minor or major significance to be grateful for each day. This is not an either/or situation in our home.) It's a ritual that both centers us in the moment AND reorients our attention beyond the dining table—there are long-term effects and cumulative benefits to this practice.

So today I invite you, too, into a space where you reflect on your own blessings and name a single gratitude. Or many.

There is so much to mourn in 2020—outrageous loss of life from a public health crisis that could have been more effectively mitigated; inability to be with loved ones during their time of suffering and death; disruptions to learning and to family traditions; a widening divide between those who live with wealth and those who live in poverty; devastating isolation for some of the most vulnerable among us; emboldened expressions of racism and transphobia and antisemitism in America. Our feelings of rage and grief are real and justified and valid.

And.



There is much still for which to be grateful.

Today I am feeling grateful to be serving a congregation who trusts scientists and willingly follows the recommendations of epidemiologists and public health experts rather than pressuring the congregational leadership to return to in-person worship imprudently.

I am grateful...

- for **healthcare workers** who continue showing up and serving the rest of us, even when they are afraid.
- for **store clerks** who do the same.
- for **teachers** who love their work and our children, and who are tirelessly crafting lessons in a context far outside of their own comfort zones.
- for relentless **advocates** who insist that we must keep the pressure on our elected officials and industry leaders to compensate all these workers more adequately and fairly.
- for **Zoom**, which allows us to connect in worship across miles and across other physical and health limitations.
- for an all-volunteer **tech team** who frees us performers from the worry of running things.
- for the exquisite **diversity of genders** and of bodies whom we honored in our Transgender Day of Remembrance and Resilience service on Friday evening.
- for all the **cisgender friends** who showed up to that service in solidarity.

I am grateful...

- for **masks** that are both whimsical and practical in keeping us safer.
- for **fresh basil**, growing in a pot by the back window.
- for musicians and their **music** and the pandemic-inspired innovations of our own stay-at-home choir.



- for the **U.S. Postal Service** and their beautiful, fun, celebratory stamps affixed to handwritten notes.
- for the other seven members of the **UUCC staff**, who are devoted and dependable in their commitment to serving this congregation.
- for **Dolly Parton**.
- for the hopeful outcome of the recent general **election**, even as it won't feel quite like a reality until our new elected officials take office.
- for children who share their **curiosity** about things that would never have even occurred to me.
- for **scientists** who reveal more and more of the world to us each day.
- and for you, **UUCC**. I am so extraordinarily and humbly grateful for who are in this world, and who you challenge and invite me to be.

I could go on and on and on, of course. That's another thing about gratitude ... the more I look, the more I notice.

But now, I'm excited to invite you to contribute to a collection of gratitude. Hannah is going to post a URL in the chat. Please click on it or paste it into a browser, and it will take you to a site where you are invited to enter a word to express something you are grateful for today. While we sing the hymn, you'll have a few minutes to go to the site and enter your word, and then we're going to display the resulting word cloud to see a visual representation of our collective gratitude.

Autumn is a season of loss, of longing, of the sloughing of extraneous things as we turn inward for the winter. It is also the season in which we must hold on to that which is most important, most integral to our being. To what do you hold on today? In what are you most blessed? For what are you most grateful?