

2021.10.10. THANKSGIVING SUNDAY SERMON ©Gyllian Davies†

Our readings this morning are all pointing us towards trust, towards recognition of abundance, towards practices of gratitude. “Do not fear”, Joel tells us. The psalmist says, “Yes. I know, as things get better you’re wondering whether to trust it or are you just dreaming. Still I assure you – your lives are in the hands of God.” Timothy tells us to “pray like crazy. For everyone.” And then Christ tells us “don’t focus our lives on worry”.

It comes down to two things: we are to embrace gratitude and we are to live in the here and now. Sounds so simple, doesn’t it. But not so fast, Sherlock! If it were all so easy we would be doing it. All the time. If it were all so easy Jesus and Joel and Timothy and all the prophets and evangelists wouldn’t be saying to us over and over again – “Live in spaciousness. Trust God. Lean into love. Sink into gratitude!” And now here we are. Living the blessing of the Thanksgiving weekend where everything is focused on being thankful and living full out in this very moment. God is good!

God is indeed very good for God has blessed us with the capacity to feel gratitude. And yet...we humans can be so very reluctant to embrace gratitude. So resistant to surrender to the abundance which surrounds us. The poet Sufi Rumi lifts it up to us:

Do not worry if our harp breaks
 thousands more will appear.
 We have fallen in the arms of love where all is music.
 If all the harps in the world were burned down,
 still inside the heart
 there will be hidden music playing.
 Do not worry if all the candles in the world flicker and die
 we have the spark that starts the fire.
 The songs we sing
 are like foam on the surface of the sea of being
 while the precious gems lie deep beneath.
 But the tenderness in our songs
 is a reflection of what is hidden in the depths.
 Stop the flow of your words,
 open the window of your heart and
 let the spirit speak.

Wonder of wonders, gratitude is actually one of our most powerful attributes. With gratitude we actually have the power to transform our own lives and the lives of those around us. Especially if we allow ourselves to feel it deeply. And we have the capacity to do that too. Here’s what happens when we do: Researchers have found that when we’re grateful we not

only re-pay our debts, we pay it forward. Even to complete strangers. How many of you have had the fun of paying for yourself *and* for someone behind you in line – maybe at the coffee counter, maybe a ticket at the movies, maybe at a toll booth or in a grocery store. Think of times when you’ve witnessed someone short a bit of cash and reluctantly telling the store clerk to remove something from their purchases. And then someone else leans forward, saying, “Please, allow me,” and contributes the needed funds. And everyone around who notices it feels brighter and lighter. Because that’s another one of the effects of gratitude – it’s contagious and it lifts the world up. People who are feeling grateful tend to be more honest and make more thoughtful decisions, acting less on impulse. When we are feeling grateful for the world we inhabit we are more patient and less materialistic. And here’s a really encouraging one – people who do daily gratitude reflections become more willing to exercise! Sign me up, right! Gratitude is one powerful avenue to living the Way of Jesus. Imagine!

But wait, the list doesn’t stop there. It’s also been found that gratitude buffers us from the storms of despair and depression. All because we take the time to notice what’s good in our lives and truly feel it deeply. I call it counting my blessings. At those times when life feels bleak, I sit down and make a list. If I can’t think of anything else that’s good I start with the basics: I say thank you that I can breathe, that my lungs work. And I feel how good it is to breathe. And then I remember that I can drink water, that delicious liquid. And that there is water to drink here. And I feel how good it is to have my thirst quenched. And then I begin to notice other things that weren’t obvious or clear to me when I began but now begin to spring up all over the place. I can think of people I love and some attribute they have which I really treasure and I do just that – stop and treasure it, feeling that abundance in my heart. And so it goes. Counting my blessings. Of course, I’m not really counting them at all. I’m naming them, lifting them up, savoring them. But doesn’t ‘counting my blessings’ just roll off the tongue so nicely!

Of course what we’re really doing is surrendering our hearts to the Creator. All those reflections on abundance and gratitude – these are ways for us to come into deeper and deeper intimacy with the Holy of Holies. They are actually a form of prayer, that basic prayer whose words are “Thanks!” They are the Spirit-light burning in our hearts, the flame of love, ready to transform the world, primed to re-make us into truer and truer Children of God. The People of the Way. The Beloved. Resting in the heart of God.

Amen!