

## “Grateful”

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew’s United Church  
October 11, 2020  
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

There are so many things we are grateful for. I’m sure we could share our many blessings if asked. But, when faced with profound adversity, even feeling hopeless, the gratitude list is harder to identify, at least for me. Those 9 lepers who were made well were surely thankful. That comment of Jesus, asking “where are they?” Seems to sound critical, but he told them to go to the priest.

But that one who stopped, turned around... The storyteller tells us it was a Samaritan, doubly cursed – an untouchable because of a skin disease, and Samaritan, well, we judgmental listeners know those people! The Samaritan turned around, however – that is code for transformation. Laying prostrate, that is face down before Jesus, and thanks him. Jesus says, “Your faith has made you well.” The Greek word for that kind of “being well” means more than just physically well – it is whole life kind of well.

Gratitude, says Diana Butler Bass in her wonderful book, *Grateful*,<sup>1</sup> talks about how difficult it was for much of her life to connect with her sense of gratitude. In the shadow of the 2016 election of Donald Trump as President, she wrote this book to explore more deeply a trend she saw; that, like her, people would say they feel grateful but then they don’t demonstrate gratitude in living, and Americans particularly seem not to show gratitude and grace the way they rant on social media.

Gratitude takes work, she says. And isn’t that true! Being thankful in everyday life takes intentionality; it takes effort, discipline. Butler Bass was encouraged to start a gratitude journal, every day writing down what she was grateful for. She noticed that after years of practicing this, she felt more grateful. Writer Anne Lamott says, “Here are the two best prayers I know: ‘Help me, help me, help me’ and ‘Thank you, thank you, thank you.’”<sup>2</sup> It is no coincidence, says Butler Bass, that various studies show people who report to be most grateful are also found to be physically healthier than ungrateful people. It makes sense, intuitively.

There are an abundance of reasons to grieve. For everything there is a time, and there is a time for grief, and for supporting one another in our grief. But our Bible stories point us to a gift, our faith, a knowing deep down that we are not alone. Signposts placed along our journeys of life that remind us: when we can’t handle this, God has got this – Got holds us. How can you and I “turn around” today, and tomorrow, and every day this week, like that Samaritan leper? How can we become ever more intentional about thanking and affirming others, and especially thanking God?

At our family meals, we often say “thankfuls” before eating. We share what we are grateful for. Sometimes that comes naturally, sometimes it is like pulling a wisdom tooth. But we do it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Grateful*. ©2018 Diana Butler Bass. HarperCollins

<sup>2</sup> *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* p.75. © 2000 Anne Lamott. Pantheon  
Page 1 *Grateful* based on Luke 17: 11-19 Thanksgiving Sunday

At this moment, what is your *thankful*? Stopping and turning around at various moments in our day, connect with our gratitude, share a thankful with God. I have a thankful. A big thankful!

Thursday morning I had an answering machine message. A woman's voice introduced herself as my beloved's birth mother. You may not have known that Tracey was adopted. Countless times, she has mused about who gave birth to her. She has always felt so blessed by her mother and father who raised her with wonderful values. Friday, Tracey spent an entire morning hearing stories around her birth and what became of her biological mother. This weekend, our family circle has widened significantly. That gratitude is easy to connect with. I'm also feeling immense gratitude for all the leaders and staff at St. Andrew's United Church who do God's work.

I'm thankful for longtime, committed disciples and new seekers alike who worship together, then, as this worship ends, the real worship of living faithfully, intentionally, every day begins. Let us work on being grateful in the everyday moments of blessing, building up our capacity to be thankful.