

THANKSGIVING/GRATITUDE I

Even if we don't have a worship service on Thanksgiving Day, I believe that it is important that we take time to give thanks for the blessings that we experience. Thanksgiving has long been one of my favorite holidays, in part because it is not driven either by religion or by gift-giving, it is just simply a time for family and friends to gather and give thanks. Now, of course, the treatment of indigenous peoples by the undocumented invaders of the Americas must be duly noted and remembered, and the holiday formerly known as Columbus Day does seem a good time for that, but even if the legend of Thanksgiving is only loosely based on reality, it is a good dream. The shared celebration between the Pilgrims and Native Americans is the way the relationship between peoples should have happened and should still be happening. It may be more myth than fact, but it is a good and hopeful myth, and in this era once again too often characterized by racial discord, abuses of white and male privilege, and the deepening chasm between the wealthy and everyone else, we need a few sustaining myths.

Early 14th Century Theologian Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) said, "If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, "thank you," that would suffice." Gratitude, which I think of as an expression of mindfulness, is one of the most important Spiritual Practices. In the midst of the frenetic pace of our modern lives, how often do we forget to say thank you? Gratitude is a practice that reminds us of our appreciation of all the blessings we have received, both in times of abundance and in more challenging times. There are always things for which we can show our appreciation, such as friends and flowers, family and fortune, food and shelter, animal companions and good health. There is really no end to the list of things for which we can and ought to be grateful. But it is easy to focus more on what we don't have, what we wish for, what we can't afford or otherwise cannot get. The grass is always greener, people we want to be with more interesting, jobs we dream about more fulfilling, cars we want faster and more fun, other houses or cities more beautiful and exciting, so that we can always find ways of being unsatisfied. Gratitude is a centering practice which helps to make us more mindful of the good things that already bless our lives.

I haven't been as grateful for this country in recent days of the last year as I have been most of my life, or especially for the preceding 8 years. I have been disillusioned with the backlash to the eight years of decorum and civility under President Obama even with the obstruction of Congress. It is hard for me to find gratitude for Trump unless it is in the hope that his failings will push our nation toward a greater level of responsibility, equality and humanity. But even these difficult times, have helped me to be more aware and appreciative of progressive and caring people all over this country and the world who want justice, peace, and equity for all persons.

I am grateful that Trump hasn't gotten us into a new war, yet. I am grateful that more and more women are feeling empowered to speak their truth about how they have been treated by men, and that many men are listening with open hearts ready to learn how we can be more respectful of women. I am grateful for the huge gains that have been made in renewable power sources here and around the world. I am grateful that more and more people are buying electric cars and hybrids and using pedal power and mass transit when possible. I am grateful that more and more people in the developed world are becoming conscious of the needs of those in the developing world. I am grateful for all those in this country who see health care as a human right and are working for single-payer healthcare for all.

I am grateful for my children and grandchildren and their families including animal companions. I am grateful for my brother and his family, for my cousins and other relatives, and for my friends new and old. I am grateful for the wide range of experiences I have enjoyed and for the hope of many more to come. I am grateful for all of you and for the other members and friends of this congregation who are not here today. I am grateful for home and shelter and food and meaningful work. I am grateful for flowers and bushes and trees, and for the animals large and small and for the ecosystems that help make sense of even mosquitoes and spiders and snakes! I am grateful for this beautiful world and the amazing creatures that inhabit it. I am grateful for forests and snow-capped mountains and flatlands where snow never falls. I am grateful for the seas full of fish, dolphins and whales, and for long beaches sculpted by waves large and small. I could go on and on, far longer than I already have with gratitude for so many good and beautiful things! There is just so much for which to be thankful!

The Universe is full of amazing things and beings and amazing mysteries yet to be discovered and understood. When I was young, I dreamed of being an astronomer or an oceanographer, to go to interesting places and discover amazing things. Sometimes as I got older, it seemed like all the interesting things had already been discovered. I read a lot of science fiction, and things out of science fiction kept being developed and are still becoming reality. As I have read and followed the sciences over the intervening years, I have come to believe that there will always be more things to discover, but most of them are currently beyond the range of imagination for most of us! Many discoveries have synthesized knowledge and previous discoveries to provide a new way of addressing some problem or opportunity, and I am sure there will be lots more new things that come in that way as well. But there are also things going on in distant parts of the universe that we have yet to even discover. I am grateful for all of these things too, at least in theory. Some discoveries have made life easier, more interesting and more meaningful, while many others have been expensive distractions.

I am grateful for the ability to discern and choose those things that have made my life more interesting, and the occasional wisdom to not choose some things that are too much of a distraction!

I have never felt all that skilled in musical endeavors, but music has been a big part of my life and I am especially grateful for music. With a few exceptions I am grateful for most music! Not a big fan of hip hop, rap, and hard metal, and I can take or leave opera, but most other music I like. I obviously enjoy singing and have enjoyed playing music on my guitar, tuba, and keyboard even if I am not that good at any of those—I think it has something to do with not practicing!

On other thing I am grateful for is the free sharing of ideas, preferably big ideas. In many ways that is what lead me to theology in the first place. My high school physics teacher told me that many of the questions I was asking were in the realm of metaphysics and theology rather than the hard and observable sciences. Some people are so sure that they know all the answers that discussion is not very productive, but there have been many nights especially around a campfire when I have discussed hopes and dreams and possibilities with friends who were as interested in exploration as I have been. Sometimes under a starry sky, I still feel the sense of wonder that for so long motivated and inspired me and I am grateful.

In a moment, I will invite you to share a few of the things for which you are grateful this year. Thanks for listening to some of the things for which I am thankful. And please accept my apologies if I haven't remembered to tell you that I am grateful for each of you and the many good things that you have done to support me, and this congregation, and each other, and to make the world better! I appreciate each of you, even if I sometimes sound annoyed or frustrated or exhausted, I really am grateful, more than I can even express for each of you and this community we share!

Gratitude is an expression of mindfulness, and we are all called to mindfulness. Wherever we walk, whatever we do, whoever we encounter, there are blessings and lessons that we encounter. Our expression of appreciation for each of those things is through gratitude and thanksgiving. As we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving, I hope we will be mindful of the mixed realities of the holiday as well as the mythic potential, and that we will be inclusive and thankful and seek to approach each other with Gratitude during this time!

So may it Be! Shalom, Salaam, blessed be, Namaste, and Amen!