

May 19 2019

Texts:

John 13:31-35 (read before children's time/child dedication)

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

Psalm 148

Praise the Blessed One!

Give praise from the heavens,

and from the ends of

the earth!

Give praise all you angels,

angels of earth and of heaven!

Give praise, sun and moon,

give praise, all you shining stars!

Give praise, all universes,

the whole cosmos of Creation!

Praise the Blessed One!

For through Love all was created

And firmly fixed for ever and ever;

Yes, the pattern of creation

was established.

Give praise to the Beloved,

all the earth,

all that swim in the deep,

And all the winged ones in the air!

Give praise all mountains and hills,  
all trees and all minerals!  
Give praise all four-legged  
and all the creep on the ground!

Leaders of the nations and all peoples,  
young and old,  
Give praise! United together in all  
your diversity,  
that peace and harmony might  
flourish on earth!

Let all people praise the Beloved,  
who is exalted in heaven and  
on earth;  
whose glory is above heaven  
and earth.

For all are called to be friends,  
companions to the true Friend,  
giving their lives joyfully as  
co-creators and people  
of peace!

Praises be to the Blessed One,  
the very Breath of our breath,  
the very Heart of our heart.

From Psalms for Praying © 2007 Nan C. Merrill

SERMON:

Tell story of my bike ride in the rain - from grumpy, wishing for something different, to noticing that I have legs that work... arrived home literally singing about what I'm grateful for. Then walked into garden and found my kale demolished by a groundhog. Instantly in a bad mood. Raging at that darn groundhog. Needed to start again...

Psalm 148 - give praise...give praise. The command to all of creation - from the heavens to the depths of the sea and literally everything in between. When we give praise we move our attention, which is often narrowly focused on ourselves and our immediate lives, to how God is evident in the world. The Trinity as creator, redeemer, sustainer. It quickly becomes personal - what's right in front of us, right now. I'm grateful for... these legs that work so well, for my... Moving to a place of noticing what we're grateful for changes us.

Gratitude is one facet of resiliency. My dad, who never spoke of the trauma he experienced as a teenager, living in Germany during WWII, was a man who was quietly resilient. Gratitude subtly guided him. He loved plants, had the greenest thumb of anyone I've ever known. He especially loved geraniums, he said they were thankful plants. Thankful - they gave much and required little. Geraniums are one of my favorite flowers - they remind me of him - give praise all you plants of color and beauty!

*Resiliency is the ability to cope with adversity, find our way through challenges and pursue opportunities.* Mental resources like determination, self-worth and kindness are what make us resilient.

Neuroscientist and author Rick Hanson says :“The harder a person's life, the more challenges one has, the less the outer world is helping a person - the more important it is to develop inner resources.”<sup>1</sup>

We develop mental resources such as compassion or gratitude, in two stages - first is experiencing it - like feeling grateful for having food in my refrigerator, or asparagus to pick in my garden, that's called activation, and the second stage, installation, which is crucial, is converting that passing experience into a lasting change in our nervous

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<sup>1</sup> [https://media.rickhanson.net/slides/9.11.18Google\\_Pos\\_NP\\_Hanson.pdf](https://media.rickhanson.net/slides/9.11.18Google_Pos_NP_Hanson.pdf)

system. Scientists like Hanson say that without this we don't have true healing or growth. There's a saying - neurons that wire together fire together. We can grow resilience and well-being throughout our day, but it's not a quick fix. It's a discipline, just like the training of any muscle or learning any thing that's really worth learning.<sup>2</sup>

Thankfulness, or gratitude, is not about minimizing or denying illness, loss or injustice. It's simply appreciating what is also true, *it's widening our field of awareness*.

Life is hard, bad things, sometimes really bad things, happen. Developing the discipline of gratitude isn't ignoring the difficult parts of life. Brother David Steindl-Rast is a Benedictine monk who has spent most of his life studying the spiritual impact of gratitude. When asked "Can you be grateful for everything?" He says, No. But you can have gratitude for every moment.<sup>3</sup>

Our brains are wired in such a way that we cannot be in a state of appreciation and a state of fear at the same time. The two states may alternate, but are mutually exclusive. But Therese Borchard, editor of the website Psychcentral swears it's possible to be grateful and depressed at the same time. She has lived with major depression much of her adult life, aware of her suicidal tendencies, doing the hard work of remaining present in her own life. It's a constant discipline for her. "So I take note of my blessings, she says. I thank God many times throughout the day. But if, at the end of my prayer, I'm still depressed ... well, that's okay. That's just the way it is." It's a discipline that she returns to over and over, strengthening her capacity to see God's presence in all things.<sup>4</sup>

What happens to us when we focus on giving praise? When we notice and give thanks for even the most mundane parts of life? My brother-in-law, Steve, says this is what it means to live as "Easter people".

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<sup>2</sup> Hanson, Rick. 2018. *Resilient*. Harmony Books

<sup>3</sup> <https://gratefulness.org/resource/gospel-gratitude-according-brother-david-steindl-rast/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://psychcentral.com/blog/grateful-and-depressed-you-can-be-both/>

I want to end with another story, because giving thanks (expressing gratitude) changes us and has the potential to change others as well.

But first, hear these words from our psalm once again:

Praise the Blessed One!

For through Love all was created  
And firmly fixed for ever and ever

Give praise all mountains and hills,  
all trees and all minerals!  
Give praise all four-legged  
and all the creep on the ground!

For all are called to be friends,  
companions to the true Friend,  
giving their lives joyfully as  
co-creators and people  
of peace!

Okay, the story: A few years ago writer AJ Jacobs started giving thanks before his meals. He'd get really specific, saying things like: I thank the farmer who grew these tomatoes. And the trucker who drove these tomatoes to the store. And cashier at the grocery where I bought these tomatoes." One day his 10 year old son said, "You know, dad, those people can't hear you. They're not in our apartment. If you really care, you should go thank them in person." And that set AJ on a quest. He decided to focus on just one thing, his beloved cup of coffee.

The quest took him months. It took him around the globe, filling him with awe, concern and caffeine jitters like he'd never had before.

AJ learned that to thank properly, he have to embrace radical interconnectedness. He realized that the coffee beans are driven to his local café in a van (so he had to thank

the driver). But the driver couldn't do his job without the road (thanks to the pavers). And the road would be dangerous without the yellow lines (thanks to the folks who made the paint). And on and on.

He end up literally thanking a thousand people in more than a dozen countries, some face to face, some by email or over the phone.

This discipline of giving thanks, untangling the interconnected web of his morning coffee, reminded him to notice the hundreds of things that go right every day as opposed to focusing on the three or four that go wrong. He heard stories from baristas in NYC to the growers in Columbia, many of whom were deeply moved to be thanked for their work. It's something they rarely receive. Being noticed and having someone say thank you changed them as well. AJ says it doesn't just take a village to make a cup of coffee. It takes the world.<sup>5</sup>

Living in the stance of seeing life as gift is a choice. It's a discipline to return to throughout our days. It's a noticing...

Noticing the little aspects of our lives and giving thanks to God again and again and again. The psalmist was onto something in calling all things - the heavens and all creatures here below, to praise God. As we move into a moment of silence I've asked a few folks to bring a song that I've been singing all week. As we hold the complexity, the joys and the suffering of our lives, may we continue to practice the discipline of giving praise. (Singing of Tallus Canon, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" in a round. HWB #658. Singers: Faith King, Sam Yoder, Evelyn B)

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<sup>5</sup> <https://heleo.com/one-cup-coffee-inspired-journey-thousand-thank-yous/19485/>