

## Gratitude Makes Community

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A few years ago, well maybe more than a few years ago now, my son, William, brought home his Thanksgiving project from school. It was a small diorama made out of colored beeswax consisting of a brown table with a yellow plate on it. On top of the plate was a red cylinder. With the diorama came a felted leaf with a paper attached that said, "I am thankful for cranberry sauce." When we questioned him, it turned out that the thing he most associated with, and looked forward to, at Thanksgiving is the canned cranberry sauce which we never have at any other time. I choose to be grateful that he has been lucky to have many meals throughout the years with extended family celebrating lots of things ... or nothing at all...so that the thing that stood out the most for him at Thanksgiving was the cranberry sauce.

It seems fitting to spend a little time considering gratitude at this time of year. Many cultures have traditionally celebrated the bounty of the harvest in the fall and given thanks to the elements, their gods, the help of their communities with a large feast. In this country the Thanksgiving holiday is largely symbolic since most of us haven't experienced the hard work of tending the crops and then harvesting and storing them. Our feasts also probably bear little resemblance to the "first" thanksgiving – the story of which has grown more complex and controversial over time.

Nevertheless, it is a good time to think about gratitude as the weather gets chillier and we turn inward. At this point in time in particular, people are suffering from concerns at a national and global level. Gratitude can help us focus down and ground us in what is good in our lives, while simultaneously allowing us to expand beyond ourselves and connect with one another.

If you were here either of the last two Sundays, you probably received a slip of paper along with your Order of Service that had a quote and a request for you to write down something you were grateful for. Over 40 slips of paper full of gratitude were returned to us. I'm going to summarize and share the responses,

but first I want to set the stage with the three quotes, one of which was on each slip:

First, from Kristin Armstrong: *When we focus on our gratitude, the tide of disappointment goes out and the tide of love rushes in.*

Second from A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh: *Piglet noticed that even though he had a Very Small Heart, it could hold a rather large amount of Gratitude.*

Finally, from Barry Neil Kaufman: *Gratitude is one of the sweet shortcuts to finding peace of mind and happiness inside. No matter what is going on outside of us, there's always something we could be grateful for.* -

As I reviewed the responses, I wasn't surprised to see a number of trends. Family was the most often cited source of gratitude, with friends a close second. Love, community, and compassion were also on people's minds. Our beautiful island, meaningful work, our minister, the sanctuary, this church and community provide.

I've been thinking a lot about the interplay of the specificity and universality of gratitude. The way that so many of our gratitudes are specific to our own lives, but universal to all. I've tried to weave the ones we received in the last two weeks together into a kind of statement to share with you. I hope I haven't left anything important out.

I am grateful to be alive on earth. I am grateful to have been born in this great nation, for living in the USA and being an American.

I am grateful for this beautiful island we call home, its surrounding waters and for the creatures who live in and around it. I am also grateful for its community – of loving and spirited individuals, including animal friends, domesticated and wild.

I am grateful for my gorgeous and caring wife; my boyfriend's cuddly chest; my husband who has taught me to be a kinder, gentler and more empathetic person.

I am grateful for the tribulations of my Irish immigrant ancestors which afforded me this life of ease. I am grateful for personal freedom, work which give meaning to my life and a sense of worth, a school that preaches compassion in all that they do and lives up to it every day.

I am grateful for colors, family, love, health, food, water, living, trees, ocean, air, breathing, peace, nature, seasons, music, friends, loving, flowers, children, church, school, and movies.

I am grateful for this sanctuary where I can spend one hour a week surrounded by thoughtful, intellectual, compassionate people and not feel judged. And I am grateful for a minister of such compassion, intelligence and heart.

I am grateful for the gift of sometimes getting it right, for seeing the compassion in other people's grief, for people who believe in me.

I am grateful for having someone to take care of, and for being taken care of when it's my turn.

My ancestors were slaves. I am grateful to be free.

*Meister Eckhart said, "If the only prayer you said was thank you, that would be enough."* Thank you.