

Sermon by Lex Breckinridge- Sept 8 2019

Pentecost 13

Luke

Welcome back! In this beautiful summer here in the PNW filled with sunshine, blue skies and mild temperatures, lots of us have taken the opportunity for travel and refreshment and lazy weekends – some of which didn't include church! Now hey, that's OK. I'm not pointing the finger. I took a few Sundays off my self and was grateful for every minute of it. But, here we are today. Labor Day has come and gone. Kids are back in school. We can already feel things starting to crank up again. And that includes our lives here at St. Thomas. So welcome back. Or better stated, Welcome Home. We come back to your spiritual home, or at least a very spiritual home, or not at least a very important one, I hope, for each of us. My hope is that everyone who enters our space will experience the kind of love, and welcome, and hospitality, that we all long for when we talk about home. A place where we don't have to present our bright shiny faces to be accepted. A place where we can be vulnerable and open, a place where we can be our real, messy, imperfect selves, and valued for who we are, God's own beloved, and not what we are. A place where we can be fed with bread and wine and laughter and healing and peace. Bread for the journey. A place where we can learn and grow as followers of Christ. A place for all the joys of life. And a place where we can even be thankful for life's challenges and difficulties. So welcome home. Even if you're here for the first or second or third time, welcome home.

All of that leads me to a question for you. Are you a glass half full or a glass half empty kind of person? Do you know what I mean by that? Do you rest in gratitude and peace for the blessings of your life, as imperfect as it may be? Or do you focus on what you lack, what you haven't done or what you don't have, what's missing, and live in restlessness and worry?

I'll confess that, depending on the day of the week or sometimes even the hour of the day, I can swing from half full to half empty to half full again. And I'll also confess on rare occasions I can even be a 10% empty kind of guy. Not allowing myself to rest in the peace and joy of the abundance of life but instead to focus like a laser on the one or two imperfections in front of me UGH! But I'll bet you know what I mean.

One thing I've learned over the years is that the way out of the glass half empty, or even 10% empty funk, is to focus on what's good and wonderful and

joyful and holy in my life. In other words to focus on gratitude. “Count your blessings”, my grandmother always said. And she meant it literally. Count your blessings, one two three. A friend of mine who’s a very accomplished business leader says he begins each day by counting his blessings. Before he even swings his feet out of bed, he counts his blessings, one, two, three. And I’ve recently been sitting with a person who is terminally ill. She is entering this next chapter in her life with courage and equanimity.

A huge key to this peaceful acceptance of what’s to come is a years’ long practice, before the lights are turned out at night. Without fail, she names five things for which she’s grateful. It may not be the same thing every day, but every day she counts her blessings, one, two, three, four, five.

Every day, in other words, she practices gratitude. Now, here’s something that shouldn’t come as a surprise to us. Neuropsychologists tell us that grateful, positive people are, on the whole, healthier and live marginally longer lives, than those who aren’t. Think about it. It really takes less energy to be open hearted and grateful than it does to be anxious and worried. Just look at your body language when you’re in those two postures.

Over the summer, the Vestry through its committees like the Strategic Planning Committee and the Stewardship Team, along with the Staff, have spent a lot of time in discernment about our opportunities and challenges for the coming program year. We’re reflecting on what’s working well for us here and on where there’s opportunity for growth. The survey that you’ve all received plays an important role in that discernment, and I hope all of us will take time to prayerfully respond to that. Your voice is very important.

So this program year marks a new season for us here at St. Thomas. And as we’ve been engaging in this summer-time discernment, what’s emerging for us is that we are grateful. Profoundly and deeply grateful for this community, for all who are part of this community, and, most importantly, for the love of Christ that has been given to each of us and what we work each day to share here. So let’s celebrate a Season of Gratitude this year.

You’ll find a folder attached to your worship sheet. It reminds us in this Season of Gratitude that living gratefully is a way of life. Paul urged the church in Thessalonica to “rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” And gratitude and thanks are not just for good times. This is our posture for living in all times, good and bad, positive and challenging.

Remember that on the night before his arrest and trial and execution, we're told that Jesus gathered his friends around the table, took bread, blessed it, broke it, held it up to God and gave thanks. Even in the midst of the worst crisis of his life Jesus was giving thanks. He was living in gratitude. How can we do any less?

Cards to be filled out: *I am grateful to God for...*

I am grateful for St. Thomas because...

Here's how I filled out my card: I'm grateful to God for my family whom I love so dearly. For friends who sustain me and gladden my heart. For work that calls out the best in me. I'm grateful to be alert and upright. I'm grateful to live in a beautiful part of the country. A country that, for all its challenges is a land of great hope and promise and blessing. And above all, I'm grateful for God in Christ Jesus who fills my heart and who continues to call me home to God's own loving heart, The Christ whose face I see all around me.

Here's why I'm grateful to St. Thomas. I'm grateful to be part of a community of loving and gracious and warm human beings. I'm grateful for the prayers that have been said for me in sickness and in health. I'm grateful to work with committed, caring, talented people as colleagues and friends. I'm grateful to serve in a community that wants to share Christ's love with one another, with all who come through our doors, and with the world, I'm grateful that you have asked me into your lives for 10 years now, and I'm grateful that you have called me friend.

So what are you grateful for? And what would it be like to live each day, each moment, grounded in gratitude. Jesus has plenty to say about gratitude. What I'm going to share with you now comes from the Sermon on the Mount and it comes straight from Jesus' own live experience. I'm reading from the wonderful modern translation by Eugene Peterson called *The Message*:

29 "Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion – do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.

30-33 If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers -most of which are never even seen --- don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in

you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God's *giving*. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God- initiative, God provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

34 Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes. “

Pretty wonderful, huh? Relax he says. Don't be so preoccupied with getting so you can respond to God's giving.....you'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met! Which is to say, live in gratitude for what is. The world God has created for you is shot full of grace. So relax. You don't have to be in charge of everything. It's not all up to you. And, as the Apostle says, Rejoice. In all things rejoice. Pray in all circumstances. And give thanks. In all circumstances, good and bad, day in and day out, give thanks. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

