

## Sermon for The Sunday Before Thanksgiving Day

November 18, 2018

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Joel 2:21-27 Psalm 126 1 Timothy 2:1-7 Matthew 6:25-33

Awaken us, O God, to the wonder of your many blessings  
And give us a sense of the miracle of faithful gratitude. Amen

- adapted from a prayer by The Rev. Renee Miller, Walk and Be Well

A few weeks ago, Beverly Bachor sent me this message by way of Facebook.

It said ...

What if you woke up in the morning, and all you had  
was what you thanked God for the previous day?

Like many Facebook postings, its originator was trying to trigger the emotions  
of the people who would read the message.

In this case, I think the intention was to invoke some guilt  
for not showing gratitude for God's many blessings.

I have to admit I am guilty of not appreciating enough, the wonders of creation,  
the miracle of this human body in which I inhabit,  
and of God's grace-filled invitation to be in loving relationship  
with each other and with God's own self.

It's this gift of grace that assures me that I don't need to lose any sleep  
worrying about whether I'm going to wake up the next day to discover  
that the Lord has taken away everything I neglected to give thanks for.

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That said, Thanksgiving Day is one of my favorite holidays.

I love it because it's everybody's holiday.

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus; agnostics and athiests;

Republicans, Democrats, and Independents;

Native people, descendants of the colonists, and newcomers to our shores can all celebrate and be thankful for the freedoms, opportunities, and abundance we share in this great nation.

Since we're in a Christian gathering today, let's remind ourselves that the Bible reminds us countless times about the need and the benefits of having thankful hearts and of expressing our gratitude.

Scientific research mirrors that same message.

A study by the University of Kentucky found that gratitude enhances empathy. It reduces aggression and increases mental strength.

Grateful people experience more sensitivity and empathy toward other people.

Veterans with higher levels of gratitude have experienced lower rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Gratitude was also observed to be a major contributor to resilience following the attacks on September 11, 2001.

The prophet, Joel, said it this way.

Do not fear. Be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things.  
You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,  
and praise the name of the Lord your God,  
who has dealt wondrously with you.

In Joel's time, and throughout history, we've known that recognizing all that we have to be thankful for, even during the worst times of our lives, fosters resilience.

Many of our beloved psalms express in poetry and song that it is good indeed to give thanks and praise to the Lord.

The psalm writers often reminded the people of Israel that they were children of one God; a God who loved, cared for, and protected them.

It was this sense of who they were, that enabled them to persevere when they were exiled and strangers in Egypt and Babylon.

For this they expressed thanks, even when they faced severe challenges.

The *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* published an article that found that gratitude increases an athlete's self-esteem, which is an essential component to peak performance.

Gratitude improves our self-image because it reduces social comparisons toward people who have more money, talent, better jobs, or other circumstances.

Grateful people are able to appreciate other people's accomplishments.

In the first century of the early church, Paul knew that thankfulness opens the door to more relationships.

His mission was to spread the Good News of God in Christ to people in lands outside the borders of Israel and Judah as well as to people of a wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul pointed out the importance of expressing gratitude to other people. This included Gentiles of common means as well as those who held high positions in government and society.

In today's world, isn't saying, "Please," and "Thank-you," one of the first things we teach children when it comes to manners and common courtesy?

I find that whenever I'm saying grace before a shared meal, I always begin by thanking God for the people I am dining with. It is important to express our appreciation, because it strengthens our relationship with **God** and with the **people** in our lives.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus discouraged people from worrying. He asked his followers ...

Can any of you, by worrying,  
add a single hour to your span of life?

As was his practice, Jesus didn't answer the question he posed, but rather, he let the listeners realize that the answer is that worrying is not a productive habit to fall into.

So, if worry is unhealthy, what's its opposite? What's the antidote for worry?

Centuries of religious practice, traditions, and research have taught us that faith, prayer, meditation, and yes, gratitude, reduce worry and stress.

Thankfulness improves psychological health.

Grateful people sleep better.

Being thankful reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, ranging from envy and resentment to frustration and regret.

Research and personal experience confirm that developing an attitude of gratitude effectively increases happiness and reduces depression.



So, on Thursday, sure we can enjoy all the traditional Thanksgiving food, and whether or not the Lions win, enjoy (or nap thru') the football game.

But let's also remember why it's called Thanksgiving Day and be mindfully aware of who we're giving thanks to.

And today let's give thanks that in The United States people of different religions can gather together in prayer to express their thanks, to God, and to each other.

Here at St. Patrick's, as faithful disciples of Jesus, we **are** thankful for the multitude of ways in which our lives are enhanced, our hearts are warmed, and our minds are inspired because we're loved by God.

Loved so much that he came to us, as one of us, in the person of Jesus, and continues to draw close to us in the many gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

#### Sources:

*The New Interpreters Study Bible*, NRSV with Apocrypha, Abington Press, Nashville, 2003

*7 Scientifically Proven Benefits Of Gratitude*, Amy Morin, Forbes, November 23, 2014