

“Living Thankfully”
October 26, 2025
Scripture: Psalm 100; Colossians 3:12-17

This reading from Colossians is one of my favorites. It states so clearly the qualities we’re called to cultivate as followers of Jesus individually and as a community of faith collectively. “Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.” Imagine a world where every person worked every day at developing those qualities in themselves. What kind of world would that be? Would it be a place where you would feel safe? Where you would feel valued?

We often overlook, I think, how unusual this movement was in a world that was very tightly controlled and restrictive. The communities that grew across the Roman Empire were diverse and dynamic and, to some, subversive. Their subversive nature lay in these kinds of qualities that were seen by many as weak and self-defeating, maybe even perverse. Things like compassion, humility and meekness have a way of promoting disorder. They encourage people to step aside and invite folks who are less privileged to participate in ways that were considered improper.

That may be why the letter writers in the New Testament spent a lot of their time talking about behaviors that reflect these qualities. “Bear with one another...forgive each other.” That kind of instruction might indicate the need for reinforcement of those characteristics because in the outside world they weren’t found very often. So, when they stepped into the community, they needed to be very intentional about what they were saying and doing with one another. Life in community was meant to be different than life outside.

It’s not easy to live with that kind of intentionality. And when you move back and forth between two modes of existence, two very different types of societies, I’m sure it can be confusing and a little nerve-racking. You may notice in this passage the real pay-off for this kind of living is the peace of Christ. By living with humility and compassion and kindness, we cultivate a sense of calm within ourselves. We’re not constantly struggling and striving and grasping. Living in this way gives us space to breathe and to really ponder what matters most. Above all, it opens us up to living thankfully instead of regretfully or resentfully. We can appreciate who we are in relationship to others around us; and we can appreciate the importance of their presence in our lives. None of us is isolated, cut off from our need for others. When we clothe ourselves with these qualities we see those around us in a new way; we’re no longer at odds with others, but we can live in harmony.

I came across a great quote recently on Facebook from a man named Jack Kornfield, a Buddhist monk who’s also a writer and psychologist. He said, “If you can sit quietly after difficult news; if in financial downturns you remain perfectly calm; if you can see your neighbors travel to fantastic places without a twinge of jealousy; if you can happily eat whatever is put on your plate; you can fall asleep after a day of running around without a drink or a pill; if you can always find contentment just where you are; you are probably a dog.” The point is we

people have a lot more trouble doing those things. Living thankfully doesn't come naturally to us. We need to work at it.

The New Testament writers understood that. It's why they were so explicit about the kind of behaviors and qualities their community members needed to cultivate within themselves. And for us, living in a world where it's easy to get lost down the rabbit holes of social media and entertainment or to be consumed with pursuing personal accomplishments in careers or school or to be overwhelmed with loss and grief, for us stepping outside those circumstances and gaining a more fulfilling perspective on the world takes some discipline. We need to engage in behaviors that condition us to live thankfully, just as we've been conditioned to react fearfully or resentfully.

One way to do that is to be intentional about how we relate to possessions. When a person defines their worth financially, to the exclusion of other dimensions, their capacity for compassion and humility and thankfulness is diminished. I'm struck, for instance, by how cavalier tech billionaires seem to be about the effect of their products on society, especially adolescents. While there may be some great benefits to what they offer, some humility and a bit of compassion could go a long way toward decreasing the harm they can cause. It could be that people in that position are so far gone and feel so deeply entitled that living thankfully is beyond them. But most of us can still distance ourselves from our possessions and learn to live thankfully.

It begins with an awareness and a sense of awe for the beauty of the world around us. In Psalm 100 we hear the call to make a joyful noise to God and worship God with gladness. This isn't because we're afraid of what happens if we don't; it's out of a genuine appreciation for our place in God's creation. We are the work of God's hands and are awestruck by God's steadfast love. The beauty around us, then, isn't external to us; we are a part of it. We are bound to God through creation. Or as Julian of Norwich once put it: "we are not only made by God; we are made of God."

Once we take that understanding to heart, how can we be anything but thankful? And how can we most clearly express our gratitude? We live our thanks through the way we live with one another. When we cover ourselves with compassion, humility, kindness and love, our actions become a doxology, a song of thanksgiving. And that compels us to use what we have for the benefit of others. This deep sense of connection to God also connects to each other. We are one, no matter how much the world wants to divide us, to keep us siloed in separate camps, we are bound to one another just as God is bound to each of us. Knowing that places a responsibility on us. We're meant to look out for each other.

That mutual care is done most effectively through community. By using our resources to support and sustain our life together we make it possible for us to act on behalf of others in ways we never could on our own. The dinners that are prepared here each month for Friends of Night People, for instance, could never be done by a single person. It takes a community to support that kind of effort. Likewise, the Thanksgiving baskets that will be prepared next month require the efforts not just of our congregation but other Christian congregations, Jewish congregations, and this year the Chinmaya Mission Hindu community as well. It's a wonderful example of our

connection to one another that takes us beyond the boundaries of religion and puts us in touch with the deep spiritual well from which we all can draw meaning.

But there are also global efforts being pursued. The Dress-a-Girl workers, made up of folks from here and beyond our congregation, send dresses and dolls to girls in refugee camps and schools in parts of Africa, the Middle East and the Caribbean. People we'll never meet are cared for through efforts made within this building and it makes a true difference in their lives. The power of compassion, the power of kindness, of humility and meekness for the sake of the gospel cannot be overstated. When we pull together our resources and allow our lives to reflect our thanks, we can change the world in immeasurable ways. That's what living thankfully can accomplish.

This morning we're dedicating our pledges for the coming year. We're trying to look forward and imagine what kind of world we want to see. Right now it feels as if things like compassion, kindness, humility and love are in very short supply. The world needs what we have to offer more than ever. The world needs a place like this; a place where compassion and love are still valued and aren't seen as weak but as the source of our strength. I encourage you to live thankfully in this moment, in spite of all the challenges we face individually and collectively as a congregation and in our society, in this moment let your giving reflect your gratitude. And clothe yourselves with love which binds us to one another and to the world. And let the word of Christ dwell in you richly so everything you do in word and deed will be done in the name of Christ, giving all thanks to God through him.

Amen