

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. We are indeed grateful that you are here. This morning, we will also be blessed by the words of Dean Bill Stackman, Dean of Students, Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Thank you for being here today.

All who are able, please stand for our responsive reading. In your Black Salter, Psalm 15.

Oh God, who may dwell in your tabernacle? Who may abide upon your holy hill?

Congregation:

Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, who speak truthfully from the hearts.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

There is no guile upon their tongues; they do no evil to their friends. They do not heap contempt upon their neighbors.

Congregation:

In their sight the wicked is rejected, but they honor those who fear God.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

They have sworn to do no wrong and do not take back their word.

Congregation:

They do not give their money in hope of gain, nor do they take bribes against the innocent.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Whoever does these things shall never be overthrown.

You may be seated.

(singing)

Bill Stackman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Bill Stackman:

Today I want to share a short story with you about gratitude. A blind boy sat on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign which simply read, "I am blind. Please help." There were only a few coins in the hat. Spare change from folks who were hurrying by. A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. After exchanging a few words with the boy, the man took the sign, flipped it over, turned it around, and wrote some words. He then put the sign back in the boy's hand so everyone would see the new words.

Soon the hat began to fill up. Lots of coins and even dollar bills. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy. That afternoon, the man who had changed this line, returned to see how things were. The boy recognized the footsteps and he asked, "Excuse me. Were you the one who changed my sign? And if so, what did you write?" And the man said, "I only wrote your truth. I said something that you said to me. I wrote, today is beautiful, but I cannot see it. I cannot see, but today is beautiful." Both signs spoke the truth. The first sign simply said the boy was blind, while the second one conveyed to everyone walking by how grateful the boy was for that day. And it also reminded them too, that they had much to be grateful for, including the ability to see, and enjoy the sunshine, and the day.

When our lives, being full of troubles, it often seems difficult to maintain an attitude of gratitude, doesn't it? All we see in that moment are our problems, like a blackened storm cloud casting a dark shadow over our lives. And it doesn't, and I don't mean to suggest that it's not important to feel, and to feel the more negative emotions, the anger, the grief, the sadness, because that too is important. But it's important not to get stuck. We have the opportunity to also let some sunshine in. And the times when everything just seems to be going smoothly, we often take those precious moments for granted. Caught up in bliss, comfort, and familiarity of it all, we can simply forget to be thankful. However, my guess is that most of us might give gratitude when things are really working out for us. Both are important, and both are opportunities.

So what then is gratitude? According to Harvard Health, gratitude is an expression and appreciation for what one receives, whether tangible or intangible. It involves both feeling and expressing thankfulness. Gratitude can also help people refocus on what they have, instead of what they lack. Simply put, gratitude as a habit. It is a way of looking at the world, and all the good things in it, with a feeling of appreciation, regardless of our current situation, and regardless if the situation is to our liking or not. Gratitude is a heart-centered approach to accepting what is, and appreciating all we have. When we practice gratitude, it even attracts more things to our lives for which we have the opportunity to be grateful.

And a few years ago, I was completing another master's degree, and this one was in positive coaching and positive psychology. And I was stunned to find out. I've heard about gratitude and many other things that lead to happiness, but I was shocked to find out how much science and research there is today to support these ways of being. In the relatively new field of positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently linked to greater happiness. Studies show that expressing gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.

A recent study found those who practice gratitude, at least once a day for no more than 30 seconds, are happier, less stressed, less depressed, less anxious, and experience greater overall physical and emotional wellbeing. What I have noticed over the years of having a daily practice... And I typically practice in the morning before and after my meditation, and if I can, I also practice before I go to bed. What I have found is that I, throughout my day, I automatically go to moments of gratitude. I'm just conditioned that way. It's not forced. And it's not like I feel like I have to, but I find myself just experiencing moments of things. Even in difficult times, those things around me, or in that situation, that I too have the opportunity to appreciate that they exist.

Over time, the practice of gratitude, even a few minutes, a few seconds a day, has shifted my patterns of thinking. Once a day is all that's needed. In closing, I want to express my gratitude for our time together, and invite you to take time today to reflect on those things in your life for which you are grateful. Thank you.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Please rise if you can, and if are able, for prayer. Let us pray. Loving God, we are grateful. Grateful for the sun, the trees, the birds, the clouds. Grateful for another day. God help us to bask and be present in all that has happened in our lives. Help us to focus on the things that bring us joy. Help us to have gratitude. In your name we pray. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples saying.

Congregation:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now let us sing together, hymn number 338, found in your hymnal.

(singing)

As we leave this place, but never away from God's presence, may we go throughout this day with gratitude in our hearts. May we meditate on the things that we are grateful for. Go in peace.

Congregation:

Amen.