

Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 26, 2020
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Grounded in Gratitude
Church of the Good Shepherd, Athens, OH

This is a very different Thanksgiving Day for many of us. For many, this is a Thanksgiving that will be missing people around a table; others won't be traveling to see family or friends; still others will be missing traditions of shopping or watching football; and there are people who will be alone all day. No matter its form, for most of us grief is a part of this year's Thanksgiving. For me, I am grieving the loss of the tradition of inviting parishioners to join my husband and me for a meal where we provide the turkey, and everyone brings something to share. It has been one of the events Michael and I look forward to every year. Not just because of the wonderfully delicious food you all bring, but because it is such a blessing to share the day with you. It is something Michael and I do to express our gratitude for all of you. And I miss our Thanksgiving Day service, which is another way we express gratitude to God for all our blessings.

Even though we can't express that gratitude in the way that has become our tradition, I believe it is even more important to practice gratitude this year. Because this year is one of uncertainty, anxiety, fear, frustration and has revealed much about our country, our lives, our institutions; some of which we may not want to look at. When it feels like so many of the traditions that ground us are being taken away, or changed, we can grow overwhelmed by the instability. That is where practicing gratitude can help.

I recently attended a virtual retreat for campus ministers in Province V, that is a collaboration of Episcopal Dioceses in the states of Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and a few others. Our keynote speaker is an Episcopal priest and marriage and family therapist who spoke to us about giving pastoral care in times of trauma, when we are experiencing that same trauma. One of her messages was the importance of practicing gratitude and how taking a moment or two every day to name what you are grateful for can help you feel grounded and find peace, even in times of trauma. Gratitude can help you find stability in uncertain times when things change quickly.

There are lots of ways to name what we are grateful for. We can write down three or five or ten things we are grateful for in a journal every day. We can do the "Five Senses Gratitude" by using our 5 senses to name what we are grateful for. We can pray the litany of Thanksgiving in the Book of Common Prayer on page 837. Or we can do guided meditation like the link with this sermon text in today's email. So many ways we can incorporate thanksgiving into our lives. All these practices teach

us the same thing: how to pay attention to the holy in our midst. That is why it is such a healthy practice and can do more than give us stability in uncertain times. When practicing gratitude becomes a way of life, we can begin to find things to appreciate even in people who irritate us, or who we fail to understand, or who we disagree with. When practicing gratitude becomes a way of life, we learn to appreciate each other and the world instead of consuming selfishly.

Practicing thanksgiving can help us see the shared humanity in our family and neighbors, even the people we don't like, and can help with healing the harmful divides in our lives and in our country.

It might seem like a small act, but practicing Thanksgiving is a powerful thing to do, it can in fact help change the world, even when the world is an uncertain place.

This year I am missing you all so very much. I miss gathering for worship and for a meal. Yet I am so very grateful to be your rector, and for the opportunities we have for ministry, for our neighbor and our neighborhood, which I hope is being made better through our presence. I am grateful for technology that allows us some form of connection during this pandemic. Above all, I am grateful for you. On this day, I hope however this Thanksgiving day looks for you, you remember you are deeply loved by God and I love you too.