

# *Gratitude As a Spiritual Practice*

The Rev. Dr. Scott Ramsey  
Psalm 30; Psalm 98  
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church  
April 3, 2022 – Lent V

“We come to you with an attitude of gratitude.” That was how Horace Tribble always used to pray before breakfasts at the soup kitchen with the Open Door Community in Atlanta, a residential Christian community that was working to serve and advocate for people who were homeless and people who were on death row. In the midst of all that social pain, Horace Tribble always summoned the people around him to gratitude. “Have an attitude of gratitude.”

Horace was Baptist, but he was standing squarely in line with John Calvin, for whom gratitude was fundamental, and with St. Ignatius, who said that *ingratitude*, the lack of gratitude, was the deadliest sin of all. Dan Thomas has been teaching us this for years, that at the root of every sin, if you dig down far enough, you will find a lack of gratitude, a failure to acknowledge that we are always the beneficiaries of God’s amazing and overflowing grace, at all times and in all situations. We do not need to earn this grace, we do not need to prove that we are worthy of this grace, we do not need to cover up all of the evidence of our sin out of a fear that God will see our sin and decide not to shower God’s grace on us. All we need to do is to receive it, and when you are the recipient of such unmerited, over-abundant grace, your heart’s response will be gratitude. John Day tells the story of talking with Gary Pinder, former pastor here at Lewinsville, and saying to Gary, “Now, Gary, if God is going to just give us all of this grace anyway, what’s our motivation for doing what is right?” John says that Gary looked at him, and said, “Gratitude, man.”

Have an attitude of gratitude.

Psalm 30 and Psalm 98, that Pam read for us this morning, are psalms of thanksgiving and gratitude. We are drawing this sermon series on the psalms to a close with the practice of thanksgiving, as the psalms provide us with a script for our gratitude. Psalm 30 says, “I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up, and you did not let my foes rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.” Psalm 30 is a prayer of someone who has known the darkness of isolation and pain, and who has found that God did not leave them there. God’s saving presence was active in the person’s life, and that presence has made all the difference. Psalm 98 summons us to sing a “new song,” because God’s deliverance calls forth new material. The old songs are wonderful, but the psalmist has been so touched by God’s wonders that the psalmist needs to do more than sing an old, familiar standard. The

new act of God demands a new song, and even if you're in Lent, the alleluia wants to be sung. "All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God, so make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth."

We are closing with gratitude because gratitude holds everything else together. 1 Thessalonians 5 teaches us to "give thanks in *all* circumstances." Philippians 4 teaches us, "Do not worry about *anything*, but *in everything* by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known to God." "Give thanks in all circumstances." Not just when things are going your way. Not just when we're getting what we want. Give thanks in all circumstances.

"But Pastor Scott. I've been listening to you the last several weeks. You've been telling us that we need to bring our griefs and our sorrows, our anger and our rage to God. Now you're telling us that it's all gratefulness?"

That is exactly what I'm saying. I'm saying that, because the life of faith in our broken and hurting world requires people who refuse to choose between celebration and grief, as though it can only be one or the other. People of faith in Jesus Christ, people of the cross, hold these things together. Life is not a matter of celebration *or* grief. Life is a matter of celebration *and* grief. The Christian symbol for this is the cross. The cross contains the worst thing that could happen, when we executed the Messiah who embodied the fullness of God's love. And the cross is where the best thing happened, where we were saved from our sins and the powers of death were broken for all time, which is why we are bold to call that tragic day, Good Friday.

The Christian practice of gratitude, taught and learned in the psalms, is clear-eyed about the pain and suffering of life. Psalm 30 knows all about weeping and anger and the Pit. The life of gratitude is not about faking it, pretending that everything is awesome. The life of gratitude flows from our knowledge that God is with you in every situation, that God will redeem everything, that God is reconciling everything and everyone in heaven and on earth, and that God's good purposes for creation will prevail. The resurrection is God's promise about that. Death and evil and sin and betrayal do not have the final word. Psalm 98 is actually an Easter psalm, read right during the penitent days of Lent.

In just a few moments, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper. You may know that another name for this meal is the Eucharist, which is actually the Greek word for "thanksgiving." This is the thanksgiving meal of the church, at the same time that it is the meal that holds all of the betrayal, suffering, and loss of Christ's broken body and poured out blood. We receive God's gifts, and in return, all we can do is to say "thank you."

In these remaining days of Lent and beyond, friends, I invite you to adopt the daily practice of gratitude. Do not wait until you are happy to be grateful. Have an attitude of gratitude now, and see what happens. When you leave church today, make

it a practice to thank someone genuinely for something before the sun goes down. If we're not careful, we may find ourselves becoming more joyful along the way. To God alone, be all the glory. Amen.