

“Increasing Gratitude, Increasing Faith”
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Faith Presbyterian Church
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1 Chronicles 16:8-13, 23-27
Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,^[a] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?^[b] ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ **But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?** ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God^[c] and his^[d] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word.

I want to wish everyone a wonderful thanksgiving. I’d also like to start with a joke today. “How do generals show appreciation to their soldiers? They give tanks.”

If we worry too much, we don’t have faith. Where is our faith? If we are grateful, we don’t have to worry about our faith. For through gratitude with build our faith.

Jesus here is talking about faith.

The father knows that you need all these things.

This is what has historically been called the “Sermon on the Mount.” However, it turns out that wasn’t a sermon after all, at least in Matthew. He sees the crowds and they follow him. But he escapes and goes to the mountain after he sat down his disciples come to him and he starts teaching them. The classic and esteemed Anchor Bible Commentary calls it “The Great Instruction,” and says the Sermon on the Mount is miscalled.”

Can we do more with gratitude? A grateful heart brings faith. I am grateful for my food, my water. Who is the source of the goodness in my life? With gratitude we look at the here and now. Or in the past all our blessings. Thank God for all I have been given. It is

backward looking but it also instills in us faith. We have been carried this far. We have been carried this far by God, why can't we have faith and hope for the future? He's also asking them to be introspective, to examine themselves. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Gratitude reminds us of God's past faithfulness.

King Jehoshaphat of Judah was up against it. His army was facing an array of enemy forces much larger than his. He was afraid. He didn't know what to do other than pray. He called for a fast throughout the land. He stood before the people of Judah and Jerusalem and prayed a prayer of awe at the power of God. He reminds everyone of the times God drove out invaders in the past. Jehoshaphat prayed, "For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

But the Lord spoke to Jahaziel who was in the crowd, saying, "Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's. ¹⁷ This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the LORD on your behalf.

The day of the battle, people were assigned to lead the army in a song of thanksgiving: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever." As they started to sing the song of praise, the Lord set an ambush and their enemies were vanquished and the Judeans did not have to do a thing.

I am struck by their prayer as they led the army into battle; it is a prayer of gratitude. They did not go before the army and pray "help us kill our foes," or even protect ourselves against this onslaught. No, they sang a song of praise. That prayer of gratitude led them to have faith in the Lord, that God would protect them even though the odds were against them. A prayer of gratitude to build their faith in God. Gratitude for his love enveloped them as they faced their foes. Gratitude led them to the faith that God would save them.

Gratitude is an ancient spiritual practice. The ancient Israelites and Judeans all practiced it. All you need to do is open a page of the Old Testament and you will see plenty of gratitude there. The psalms and other books in the Hebrew Bible are brimming with prayers of gratitude. Our Old Testament reading is overflowing with prayers of gratitude to God. For example, "O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. ⁹ Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. ¹⁰ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice."

There is also some scientific evidence linking gratitude to better mental health. Luis Romero wrote on Forbes.com a few years ago about a doctor's research that found that gratitude increases the neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin and the hormone oxytocin, which are associated with feeling well and having a lighter outlook on life. ¹

¹ Luis Romero, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/luisromero/2017/11/22/gratitude-the-ultimate-spiritual-practice-a-thanksgiving-special/?sh=31ee10502706>

Gratitude lists are a good one to build faith because we see all the past blessings that God has bestowed upon us, and it gives us hope for future blessings.

One thing we can always be grateful for is that we only must do life in 24-hour increments. A wise friend of mine once said to me, "If we stay in today, we got it made." That gets to what Jesus is saying in verse 34 of the Gospel reading. Today is enough for today. We have to plan ahead for trips, budgets for the coming year, retirement savings, things like that, but the principle Jesus is getting at is staying in the day.

Jesus is telling his disciples that if God provides for the birds of the air that they on a daily basis will get enough to satisfy them, then won't he do that for us? We of little faith? God knows what we need already. God is telling us to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness and we will be taken care of. This is all a test of faith for us. Tomorrow's worries will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Today's worries were enough for them then. People didn't live long. And they scratched out a living. There wasn't much they could do other than stay in the day so they wouldn't be completely despairing. All they had was enough money or goods to barter to get food for the day. It was subsistence living.

Let us give thanks for our neighbors down the road at the Sierra Vista United Korean Presbyterian Church where we will go for lunch today.

At 33, Kristi Nelson, who is now the director of A Network for Grateful Living, was diagnosed with stage IV Hodgkin's lymphoma that had spread to her spine. For 18 months she was being treated for the disease with chemotherapy and other treatments and surgeries. She was able to survive and go into remission. The first few years of this time she was extremely grateful, she was so happy to be alive. But over time, she took life for granted again.

Nelson writes: "I got healthy and busy. I began chasing goals and the fulfillment they promised. I martyred myself to a job, complained about things like traffic, my weight, and colds. I ruthlessly compared myself to others, succumbed to retail therapy and debt, and suffered from stress. Each year that passed, I built up a kind of gratitude tolerance—what used to be enough got left in the dust in the pursuit of having more. Having cheated death, I began cheating life."²

Nelson ended up going through a deep spiritual valley and she realized that gratitude was something she needed to practice daily. Nelson writes, "The practice of looking

² Kristi Nelson, <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/gratitude-is-a-practice-2022-11-25/>

at the world through grateful eyes and with a grateful heart is an exquisite end in itself.”

Jesus is talking about trusting God. It's all about faith and trusting God. History is replete with tales of god's chosen people the Israelites losing faith and having God rescue them.

Let's thank God for today. For the time we have with each other today. The opportunity to make new friends down the street today.

I challenge you all to make gratitude a part of your daily spiritual practice each and every day.