

2022 10 09 – Joy through Gratitude

Scripture: Deuteronomy 16:1-11
Psalm 100 (The Inclusive Bible)

This week I watched a video on YouTube called the [365 Grateful Project](#). The video was actually a [Ted Talk](#) and the person speaking was a young woman named Hailey Bartholomew. In the video Hailey explained that, at one point in her life, she realized she wasn't happy so she decided to go to a nun, a spiritual director, for help. The nun suggested that she might want to look for things in her life for which she was grateful.

Hailey, being a photographer, decided that she would begin a photo project. For 365 days she took one gratitude picture a day. Each day, as she worked and cared for her family, she identified one thing for which she was grateful, and took a picture. She took pictures of lots of different things: her children, beautiful colours, her friends, special occasions and even bugs. Hailey realized that she had many reasons to be grateful and that practicing gratitude was making her happy. Gratitude was bringing joy into her life.

Then one day, at supper time, Hailey realized that she hadn't taken her gratitude photo for that day. She looked around for something to shoot and noticed that her husband had just place the biggest, the best piece of pie on her plate. And she suddenly realized all the ways that he put her first in his life.

She had never thought of her husband as a romantic, in fact, that had become an issue in their marriage. She often complained about the fact that they didn't go on dates anymore and he wasn't one to bring her flowers. But Hailey started to notice other things: how he held her hand whenever they rode together in the car; how, on a hot day, he would pick up ice cream for her on his way home from work, and how he played his ukulele and sang their children to sleep at night. Hailey realized that, in fact, he was romantic in his own way and that he had always been enough just as he was.

Nothing changed in Hailey's life except her ability to stop and notice the love, the beauty and the goodness that was already there. By practicing gratitude on a daily basis Hailey Bartholomew found the happiness, the joy that she was missing.

There are many YouTube videos, books and podcasts that talk about the importance of gratitude in our lives. Some of these may be available via social media, a relatively new technology, but gratitude is not a new concept. In fact, today's scripture passages are about gratitude and giving thanks and they were written over 2500 years ago.

In Deuteronomy we hear the words of Moses as he prepares his people, the Israelites, for their new life in the land that God has promised them. Moses makes it clear that they are not to take the Promised Land for granted. Once they have settled in and completed their first growing season, then the Israelites are to put the "first fruits" in a basket and take that basket to the priest so that it

can be set in front of the altar of YHWH. The basket of first fruits is like one of Hailey's photographs. It's like the produce set in front of us today. It is a reminder of all the reasons that we have to be grateful in this moment.

But Moses' instructions don't end there. The Israelites are also asked to recite the story of their people. They are asked to remember how their ancestor Jacob, the wandering Aramean, brought his family to Egypt during the famine and how they grew in numbers and then were enslaved by the Pharaoh. How they escaped from their oppressors were led through the wilderness to the Promised Land, "a land flowing with milk and honey." And how all this was possible only with the help of their God, YHWH.

Like Hailey, like the Israelites, we all have reasons to be grateful, we all have stories to tell, we all have baskets or pictures or memories to share. The problem is that most of us don't practice gratitude on a regular basis.

Thanksgiving is a wonderful holiday, but practicing gratitude one day a year just doesn't cut it. When talking about her research, author Brené Brown wrote,

Without exception, every person I interviewed who described living a joyful life or who described themselves as joyful, actively practiced gratitude and attributed their joyfulness to their gratitude practice. (*The Gifts of Imperfection*, page 77-78).

A gratitude practice can take many forms including: gratitude journals, meditation or prayer, creating gratitude art (like photographs) or even stopping during our busy day to breathe and say the words, "I am grateful for...." What a difference

those few moments a day can make in our lives. They can allow us to not only sing and recite the joyful words in Psalm 100 but to experience them as well:

Acclaim YHWH with joy, all the earth!

Serve YHWH with gladness!

Enter into God's presence with a joyful song!

The other amazing thing about gratitude is that it is not only linked with joy, but also with generosity. The practice of gratitude helps us to understand that what we have is enough. Like Hailey, we realize that we don't really need all those things we think we need, like romantic dates and flowers. Instead of focussing on what we don't have, practicing gratitude makes us grateful for what we do have. Instead of allowing the fear of scarcity to take over, we are able to open our hearts to the needs of others, we are able to generously share what we have.

Tara Brach, an American psychologist, author, and teacher of Buddhist meditation, puts it this way:

Gratitude is like breathing in – letting ourselves be touched by the goodness in others and in our world. Generosity is like breathing out – sensing our mutual belonging and offering our care. When we are awake and whole, breathing in and out happens naturally.

<https://www.tarabrach.com/gratitude/>

In the final verse from today's reading Moses says that after expressing their gratitude to YHWH, the Israelites would be able to feast on all the good things

that they had been given. But he made it clear that they shouldn't feast alone. They were to eat with the Levites and the foreigner that lived among them. In other words, they were to share what they had been given with others, with those in need, with the outsider. We too are being asked to share what we have and to do so with gratitude and joy.

I want to end my reflection today with a modern poem written by the Rev. Ray Friesen, retired Mennonite pastor, [author](#) and member of our congregation. He has written this poem in the style of the ancient psalms of praise, the ancient songs of gratitude.

Hallelujah!!
From the bottom of my heart, with my whole being
I shout it out: "Thank you God!"

Wherever people gather
I let them know how thankful I am for all God has done.
I sing "How great thou art" at full volume. Who cares what it sounds like?!
I dance for joy! Who cares if I can't dance?!

Consider the Universe, in its vastness and its micro-tinyness
I could spend a lifetime studying biology, astronomy, physics, chemistry
With the James Webb Telescope and the most powerful microscope and
cyclotrons
And I would barely make a dent in what is to be learned and discovered.

Everything God does confirms how wonderful the Almighty is:
Creation, Love, Presence, Caring, Forgiveness
The Love that is implanted in all humans
Our sense of human rights and social justice and fairness
The compassion in our hearts.
All gifts of the Creator.

Intuition, whisperings of the Spirit, wisdom, insight
All gifts of the Giver of Life
Teachings about Life, guidance for Living
Words of Wisdom, a sense of what is Right and Good
All gifts of the One whose Word we see in Jesus
Relationship. Personhood. Love and Forgiveness
A sense of being embraced by Love,

Love bigger and deeper and higher and
more profound than I could ever imagine.

Live the ways of the Almighty and life will make sense
Follow the guidance of God's teachings and
the way forward will have purpose and meaning
Live in sync with God and the wilderness will begin to bloom

May it be so. Amen.