

Thanksgiving Day
Joel 2:21-27, Psalm 126, Matthew 6:25-33
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When certain presidential hopefuls want us to focus on fear, Thanksgiving Day comes just in time to get us back to right thinking and faithful living. “Jesus said, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink, or your body, what you will wear.’” In 2015, would he have included, do not worry about refugees and all Muslims?

My brother Jim lives in rural France several hours south of Paris. After the attack, he emailed me about making revisions in his will, just in case. I told him it was fine to amend his will, but there was probably more of a threat to his life from driving in his car than being killed by a terrorist. I concluded my email to him with, “Drive safely.” He agreed.

The antidote to all worry, fear and anxiety is, of course, gratitude. Fear and thankfulness cannot occupy the same space.

Our yoga teacher, Hope, is a very upbeat and cheerful person. She sent her students this quote from Melody Beattie prior to Thanksgiving Day last year. “Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.”

I ride my bicycle past the Gary’s United Methodist Church down on College Road in Prince George. I am always eager to see what clever message is on the marquee in front of the church. Most recently it read, “Wag more and bark less.”

In our church bathrooms, Claire posts helpful health tips. For the past few weeks, we have had an *Upward Happiness Spiral*. It goes around like this:

Gratitude improves sleep.

Sleep reduces pain.

Reduced pain improves your mood.

Improved mood reduces anxiety.

Reduced anxiety improves focus and planning.

Focus and planning aids decision making.

Decision making improves enjoyment.

Enjoyment gives you gratitude.

Gratitude improves sleep.

At the top of the cycle it says, “Give us grateful hearts, O Lord.”

Now you may be thinking to yourself. Well, not everyone is naturally thankful. This is true.

An article I read recently by a seminary dean, Martin Copenhaver, was titled, “Learning to give thanks.” He starts out, “No one is born thankful.” He goes on to write, “In fact, every

thanksgiving holiday we confront an irony: the more we have, the less likely we are to thank God.”

Copenhaver believes that thankfulness doesn't come automatically but is rather a learned behavior. Our faith doesn't tell us how to feel, but it does inform us on how to act. Our actions will often determine our feelings. St. Paul tells us to give thanks always and in all circumstances. (Ephesians 5:20) By expressing thanks, we become thankful. (repeat)

Copenhaver concludes by quoting C.S. Lewis as saying, “Praise is inner health made audible.”

This year I am trying to be more aware of and thankful for my imperfections. I want to improve in the art of laughing at myself. I have much to be thankful for, having thus far survived my mistakes. What do you need to be more thankful for?

Today's gospel is my very favorite as I always delight in my birds and bonsais and zinnias, and this year we had the most gorgeous maples in our backyard turning yellow, pink and red all on the same leaf.

Nothing can replace spending time in nature to restore our soul and sanity and our thankfulness for the simple and free gifts from our creator God.

In that vein, let me conclude with a poem by Wendell Berry.

THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

*When despair for the wild grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*