

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • NOVEMBER 25, 2018

The Psalm Litany

Based on Psalm 132

*We remember David and the hardships he endured,
how he could not rest until he found a place
where God would be honored.*

***Rise up, O God, and find your place among us
and lead us to where we are found.***

*The Lord of the universe is not imprisoned by stones,
in houses made with human hands,
**but lives in the hearts of those who love
in return, in the covenant of life,
knowing the wisdom and power of God.***

Let us lift our thankful hearts to God:

***Eternal and ever-present Creator,
there is no shadow of turning without you.
Planting and growing, harvest and sharing,
your bounty, provision, and glory are thine! Amen.***

The Scripture

Luke 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So, he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

The Message
Building Gratitude
Nick Larson

Gratitude is not just for Thanksgiving. Gratitude, as an attitude toward life, comes when you experience deep and overwhelming appreciation for life.

For instance, I have tremendous gratitude to each and every person who helps someone traveling with young children, particularly in airports. I remember one such trip several years ago right after, as a family, we traveled to Colorado to celebrate Lia's fourth birthday. It was the beginning of July, and we flew out to celebrate the 4th and then Lia's birthday on the 7th. Yet, that year we left for our Youth Mission Trip on something like the 6th. So, I flew back a few days early to hop in the car and help escort some 25-odd youth and adults to do God's work in the world.

Small mercies lead to big things. While I was off leading a trip, Julia was flying back into Kansas City with a rambunctious 4-year-old and Ian, who would have been 16-17 months at the time. Now if you've ever had to do anything with a four-year-old in toe and a toddler, who mostly at that stage wants to be held whenever it would be adventitious to put them down and who want to be put down at those exact moments where there is nowhere to set them down.

It's like the exact opposite of the thing you need. I remember one time when I was traveling with one of our kids at that infant stage, and the stewardess on the plane offered to hold the infant while I used the bathroom, cause what do you do with an infant when you have to squeeze into an already tiny airplane bathroom? Thank goodness for small mercies.

On that particular, non-dual parent trip, Julia pulled off a superhuman feat. She arrived at the Denver airport 3 hours before her flight (which tells you I could have never pulled this trip off). And thank goodness she did, because security was insane that day. We had just purchased this new jogging stroller second hand, and of course they make you fold those things up and try to put them through the X-ray machines, which of course, when you have a four-year-old and are wearing an toddler in a carrier is a next-to-impossible task. Thank goodness for the kind TSA employee who waved them through the wheelchair line.

Then there was the inevitable potty-accident by the four-year-old that sends everyone to the bathroom to try to change their outfit. Thank goodness for diaper bags that hold spare changes of clothes.

And then where do you put that stroller while you must help the four-year-old out of their wet pants? Nowhere, that's where. Thank goodness for the kind woman who

stood right outside the stall talking to Julia who is at this point inside the stall helping the four-year-old. “It’s okay little baby, I’m right here, and I’m gonna push your stroller back just a bit so that mom can see the wheels under the stall, so she knows we are gonna wait right here for them to finish up.”

And then after making the flight by just a few minutes, even though they arrived through security with an hour before they were supposed to board; because thank goodness for fast food workers, who bring food out to a table for them even when that employee had to walk all the way around the counter to pick up the tray to deliver it to their table.

And thank you to the kind person who follows that parent onto the plane and lifts their suitcase into the overhead bin, while she attempts to convince that four-year-old that this is, in fact, her seat and not that one way over there that she wants to sit in.

And thank goodness for that over-diligent parking shuttle attendant, who gets them unloaded from the shuttle and the kind business traveler, who walks your wife to your car just to make sure they get all their stuff and onto the road, leaving her with still only a two-and-a-half-hour car ride home, still with a four-year-old and an toddler.

This month, I have read several studies that have been centered around the need of *Gratitude*, one from the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, which showed that individuals with habits and practices of gratitude showed higher alertness, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness, and energy. It read, “The moment you shift from a mind state of negativity or judgment to one of appreciations the brain function becomes more balanced, harmonized, and supple. The heart begins to pump in much more coherent and harmonious rhythm, and biochemical changes trigger a host of healthful responses throughout your body (J & M Levy).”

These researches propose that gratitude is so much more than we think and describe it as a two-stage process. So, let’s examine their hypothesis through looking at Gratitude... for being in worship. If you weren’t already thinking about this, then may you have a new feeling, just let that well up inside of you.

For me, gratitude for being in worship centers when I stand at this communion table week after week and look out onto all of you. When I do, I’m filled with appreciation for that very present moment. That’s the first stage, the emotional response. And the second stage, as they describe it, is to be so transformed by gratitude that we act on it. So, it isn’t enough to just feel grateful, but we need to practice it in some small or large way.

So, in my communion example, it is not enough to have the emotional response in the moment for what God has done for us, but then I need to take it with me into the world, to be different and act differently after I've received from the table.

So, one might express gratitude for this opportunity by perhaps telling other people about your experience of love and welcome at the table. That would be *true* gratitude. It would be an action that you took in response, because you are imparting and impacting others with it. You are building upon the underlying feelings.

We, as human beings, must build with gratitude. We have endless opportunities to co-build a beautiful city with God. Not a city of angels where everything is perfect or ignores the hardships of life, but we can build a human city, brick by brick *where we give up being bitter for something better*.

Emotional responses are fine, but actions are better. Gratitude invalidates the false narrative that things are the sum total of human existence and that despair gets the last word. Gratitude gives us a new story. Gratitude gave Zacchaeus a new story.

When we experience trials and tribulations in our lives, and we will, we don't want to mask that with some gratitude veneer over some negative situation. We want to look beyond the circumstances and realize that with gratitude for life itself, seeing every breath as a gift and a grace from God can allow us to sing on through any darkness, to see the soul of the very encounter, to allow Christ to be our sight, and like that early morning resurrection after our Savior lay in the grave for three days, we can see the coming of the light and be at home in it.

Jesus tells Zacchaeus that he, the Son of Man, came to seek out and save the lost. God is incarnate dwelling not in isolated purity but rather as a friend to a hated tax collector. Zacchaeus would have been perceived to be outsider to the official family of faith, to whom many thought Jesus had come, among whom he had eaten, and for whom he continued his journey towards Jerusalem. The grumbling crowd was full of those who are not awake in their thinking and could not fathom God moving beyond the boundaries of an official faith family.

Since Zacchaeus was a Jew and not a Roman citizen, there was only one way he could become wealthy. In lands that they conquered, Romans offered some political positions to local inhabitants. The tax collector positions were the avenue by which Rome practiced its quid pro quo patronage. Zacchaeus knew how to play the game. He was – quite literally – a climber. Success meant to gain as much status as allowed...to go as high as he, a lowly Jew, could go. We often sing about how Zacchaeus was a *wee little man*, but in reality, he was a big man; the story tells us the *chief* tax collector.

When Jesus passed the tree upon which Zacchaeus had perched himself, he looked up and saw him. And unlike perhaps anyone else in human history, Jesus did not see a jolly, short fellow tangled in sycamore branches. He saw an agent of the enemy state of Rome, and yet, someone he perceived capable of transformation.

So, what did he say? “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down! For I must stay at your house today.”

Jesus called him down, ordering him to stand as equals with him, a Jewish rabbi, who did not have wealth or status, especially in the empire. Then he invited himself over to dinner. He, the one without, invited himself to the house of the one with.

Tree or Table? Climbing to get ahead or reclining with friends? Choose. What you choose results in either slavery or abundance.¹ To which the story tells us that Zacchaeus was not upset or distressed, but instead hurried down and was happy to welcome Jesus.

Even when everyone else stands around to grumble at you, when Jesus looks beyond your life and into your heart, you should jump at the opportunity to welcome him into your house.

And Zacchaeus, due to his gratitude for his encounter with Jesus, embraces this claim of salvation with not just personal and private virtue, but as economic and public practice as well. Proclaiming not just that he was stepping out of his role as supporter of empire, but even more, was now promising to pay back four-fold everyone whom he had defrauded and give half his wealth to the poor.

The acts through which Zacchaeus evokes Jesus’ announcement that ‘salvation has come to this house’ have to do with more than kindly attitudes and warm feelings. They are more than emotional responses. They have to do with economic restitution for those who have been cheated and concrete provision for those who are destitute.

Or as Paul says it, without love we are just a clanging gong. Thus, salvation must encompass more than inward and spiritual grace leading to heavenly rest. It involves, as well, outward manifestations that make a practical and observable difference to the needs and conditions of people in the here and now.

Jesus is saying, to Zacchaeus and to all of us, “Stop climbing, and come and sit.” Jesus envisioned gratitude as hospitality of mutuality and relationship, of **gift and response not as debt or duty**. Receivers of blessing and grace, like hosting the Son of Man for dinner, comes not with a debt attached or a favor to be repaid, but with

¹ Diana Butler Bass *Grateful* p. 160 © 2018

gratitude and a way forward that invites one to graciously pass whatever gifts they can onto others instead of paying back a benefactor.

Jesus called Zacchaeus, and truly everyone, to equal footing, to a circle of gratitude, to a city of gratitude where each inhabitant will eventually be on the receiving because need.

Once you've been that single parent traveling through airports with two children four-and-under, you stop to help the one you see, not because you must, or because you owe it, but because you, too, were once in need. So now, when Julia travels for work, she is the one who makes silly faces at the upset infant or helps a solo mother with her bag at the baggage claim or walks that single father and his two kids to their car to make sure they get on the road okay.

I read this great quote from Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast, which declares, "If you're grateful, you're not fearful, and if you're not fearful, you're not violent. If you're grateful, you act out of a sense of enough and not a sense of scarcity, and you are willing to share. If you are grateful, you are enjoying the differences between people, and you are respectful to everybody, and that changes this power pyramid under which we live."

There is enough; enough for all people, in all times, and in all places. In the biblical view, God gives all gifts, and we human beings accept them and pass them on to one another. We never owned them to begin with.

There are lots of reasons beyond Thanksgiving to share gratitude. Gratitude is a way of life.

Like at a societal level, the U.S. median household income is higher than it's ever been, and the poverty rate is declining (although not as fast as it should be given our economic growth but still). Cause for gratitude. And there are also, of course, many personal reasons, like love among family and friends...there are babies!

And there are human accomplishments big and small. Maybe you got a promotion at work, or passed a class that was difficult. Or overcame your anxiety to call the dealership about that warning light that has been on your dashboard for a month (or maybe that's just me). Or really big ones like loved ones getting married, or finding out someone is pregnant, or discovering a really great new restaurant.

But whatever it is, if you look hard at your life over the last several months, you will find causes for gratitude. There will be accomplishments that you are proud of, or developments that you are joyful about, and in my experience, at least, if you don't

pause to hear those words, “Get down out of that tree,” then life is never gonna bring you much joy.

In my life, anyway, the weird thing is that if I take time to be grateful, like on a daily basis, then I can find joy in things that from the outside don't really seem that impressive – like a sink with no dirty dishes in it, or seeing the actual wood surface on my desk. But I work my tail off for those, and I am super psyched about those!

But if I don't take the time to be grateful, I feel almost nothing about those same or even larger accomplishments.

So, here's my advice; take the time. Get a bottle of champagne, and you don't have to get the good stuff. Heck, if you don't drink, then get a really great cheese or something that you love. You have a friend or two over, or you gather together your roommate, or your parents, or your partner, or whomever, and you break bread or pop champagne, or sip tea, or whatever; and you celebrate. You talk about the wonderful thing that has happened. You tell that story about how you won that game of Fortnite, or you made that student-loan payment, or you got that promotion. And you celebrate it! And you invite those that you are celebrating with a moment to share what they are celebrating.

Because friends, you can and should be building a city of gratitude, one that starts with your moment of celebration and then, like Zacchaeus, let it spread to help us navigate the challenges that face our collective lives. Let it become your social ethic by which you widen the circle, listen to Jesus who is telling you, “Come down. Join in.” The circle has found you, be grateful even in the face of injustice, because we know that gratitude could change everything.

Amen.