

True Gratitude

Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good.

Maya Angelou

I am in the middle of taking an online course about gratitude that is based on a book, *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks*, by Diana Butler Bass. Given that we are a week away from the traditional American holiday that is focused, at least in theory, on giving thanks I thought it would help me be more grateful. It isn't that I am not grateful, but what was drilled into me by well-meaning parents and society is a debt-based gratitude.

My parents taught me to never show up empty handed to someone's house if you are invited over for a meal. Of course, that is a great philosophy to live by and one that is generally good. It can however be a negative if you feel uncomfortable going if you can't bring something or return the favor. It puts you in a situation where you need to pay back the person for their kindness or generosity. This creates a hierarchy that does not allow other people to simply share their generosity. If I invite you to my house, it is out of my gratitude for all that I have and my desire to share it with you. True generosity does not expect something in return. Gosh, that is so very hard to accept when you are conditioned to always pay people back for their generosity.

Another lesson that my parents taught me was to always write a thank you note when someone gave me a gift. Again, a wonderful response to receiving a gift. I know that I have been miffed when I sent someone a gift and did not receive a thank you in some form. I expect to be thanked, that is the value that was instilled in me. Butler Bass says that that too is debt-based gratitude. If we expect something in return, then it is a gift with strings. The string being that I expect a thank you for the gift. I expect something in return. So, it is not a gift. Gratitude really is not as easy as we think.

And I think that is why we have so much trouble accepting God's love and gifts. We think we need to earn God's love; we think we need to give something back for God's gifts. And those thoughts come from a good place, from well meaning parents and society that wants us to be respectful and gracious. We look at things from our perspective and that it natural. God's perspective is not ours. God's love is truly unconditional and freely given. All debts have been paid by Christ, there is nothing for us to do except accept God's love and forgiveness.

I am working to be more grateful and accepting. As we approach Thanksgiving and Christmas, I pray that you too would accept with gratitude the gifts that are given to you by God and by each other. My prayer is that we would join together in gratitude and love toward each other and with each other.

In Peace,

Pastor Suzanne