

Grounded in Gratitude

St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church

May 11, 2025

The election of a new Pope this week reminded of the story of 4 Catholic mothers were having coffee and discussing their wonderful sons. The first mother said, "My son is a priest. When he walks into a room, everyone calls him Father." The second woman chirped, "Well, my son is a bishop. Whenever he walks into a room, people say, 'Your Grace.'" The third woman said smugly, "My son is a cardinal. Whenever he walks into a room, people say, 'Your Eminence.'" The fourth Catholic woman sipped her coffee in silence. The other three gave her a subtle, "Well?" so she said modestly, "My son is 7 foot four and weighs 350 pounds.. Whenever he walks into a room, people say, 'My God!'"

Happy Mothers Day to all mothers out there.

On a grey Friday in January 2007, during the peak of the early morning commuter rush, an unassuming young man entered the L'Enfant Plaza train station in Washington D.C.

As the crowds rushed by, the man found a place to stand out of the way of the foot traffic. He opened the violin case he carried. He threw into the case a few coins and dollar bills to "prime the pump." And then he proceeded to begin playing.

But this was no ordinary street musician. The anonymous violinist in the train station was Joshua Bell, renowned virtuoso, star of the symphony circuit. Only three days earlier audiences had shelled out between 100.00 to 200.00 bucks for a ticket to watch him play at Boston's Symphony Hall. Now, as he stood just a few feet from clueless commuters hurrying to work, Bell played his heart out on his multi-million dollar 1713 Stradivarius violin.

Bell began with "Chaconne," from Bach's Partita No. 2 in D Minor. Bell calls this a "spiritually powerful piece, emotionally powerful, structurally perfect." By the way, "Chaconne" is also considered one of the most difficult violin solos ever written.

Can you guess what happened?

Did busy commuters suddenly stop in their tracks, mesmerized by this master violinist, and drift towards the magical music?

Not so much. For the first three minutes of Bell's "concert" no one passing by acknowledged anything. Not the music. Not the musician. Nothing. Nada. Everyone hurried by, head down, fixated on their next destination.

At four minutes one woman hurriedly tossed a dollar into Bell's open violin case. Finally, after six minutes, one commuter stopped, leaned against a wall, and listened to the gift that was being poured out into that train station air.

Bell played for 43 minutes. He made a grand total of \$32.00 off of 27 donations. ("Better than minimum wage," Bell noted later). Two people stopped to listen. The other 1,070 people who passed in front of him simply skittered by, oblivious, obsessed by their own agendas. (You can find this story, along with some video clips you can use, by Googling the Washington Post article "Pearls Before Breakfast").

John Lake, author of *Timeless Beauty: In The Arts and Everyday Life* (2003), succinctly summed up what this missed moment revealed about all those busy commuters, and about us:

If we can't take the time out of our lives to stay a moment and listen to one of the best musicians on Earth play some of the best music ever written; if the surge of modern life so overpowers us that we are deaf and blind to something like that, then what else are we missing!

Maybe I should read that again:

If we can't take the time out of our lives to stay a moment and listen to one of the best musicians on Earth play some of the best music ever written; if the surge of modern life so overpowers us that we are deaf and blind to something like that, then what else are we missing!

Obviously that "what else" is life itself. Taking in the gifts of goodness, beauty, and truth when they are offered to us is the heartbeat of life. It is living in gratitude for all that God has given us.

The Psalmist, who was both a poet and a musician, asked, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?" (Psalm 116:12). But we have to recognize God's gifts before we can offer thanks for them!

If any nation in the world ought to be thankful to God and grateful for His goodness, it ought to be America. If any people in America ought to be thankful to God and grateful for His goodness, it ought to be Christians. If any group of Christians ought to be thankful to God and grateful for His goodness, it ought to be Christians in this church. We ought to have an **attitude of gratitude**.

Last week, Fr. Roman reminded us in a powerful way of our mission "to unite all people with the love of God in Christ" and of our vision, "to live out the Gospel of Christ as a body of believers rooted in faith and growing in community." He pointed out that these two are deeply interconnected. For that to happen, though, we must develop an "attitude of gratitude."

So, here's a question: How grateful are you? Grateful about what, you ask?

Well, let's start with water. Did you know that only three percent of the water in this world is fit to drink? Did you know that only one-third of one percent of the world's water is *available* to

drink, and most of that clean water is right here in the United States of America? Did you know that over one-half of the world has no access to pure drinking water? Oh, how grateful we ought to be for water—and all the blessings of God.

Well known pastor, James Merritt has said, “I have discovered that some of the best blessings are not the biggest ones, but the smallest ones. We ought to be grateful for venetian blinds. If it weren't for them it would be curtains for all of us.”

Our capital campaign we call, **Strong roots; building for the future** is underway. This begs the question, Is it wrong for leadership to make an appeal for building funds? I don't think it's wrong, but it is certainly Biblical. King David organized one of the first, and, and I might point out, most successful building campaigns in history over three thousand years ago. You probably remember the story. You can read it for yourself in 1 Chronicles chapters 22-29. David loved God and was so grateful for what God had done for the Children of Israel, that he wanted to build a place for God to be worshipped, patterned after the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. Since Exodus, the Ark of the Covenant had been kept in a tent. David said, “I am living in a palace of cedar wood, and the Ark of God is in a tent!”

But, alas, because David had shed so much blood, God told him that he would not be the one to build the temple, but rather his son, Solomon], a man of peace, would be the one to build it. Now, David could have said, “Fine let him lead his own capital campaign,” but instead David set out to empower the vision God had put on his heart. He didn't live to see the completed Temple, but he believed in the vision God gave him for the future and, did his part to make it a reality. My friends, even though we are not setting out to build a temple, it is incumbent upon each of us to embrace the vision God has given us here at St. Dunstan's. And what we build should be built out of gratitude for God's glory and His blessings upon us.

Let talk a moment about gratitude and thankfulness. On the surface, they seem to be the same, but, in reality, being thankful and the practice of gratitude are two different things.. We all grew up being told to be grateful and to say “Thank You” when someone did something kind for us. It became easy to use these terms interchangeably, but what we have learned is that thankfulness and gratitude are not synonyms.

Where thankfulness is an emotion, **gratitude is an attitude** of appreciation under any circumstance. Gratitude involves being thankful, but it is more than that. Gratitude means expressing thankfulness and being appreciative of life daily even when nothing exciting happens. When you are late for work, your coffee spills in the car, and you realize your socks are two different colors, gratitude is the smile on your face as you reach your destination. Gratitude is your decision that the day is a good day even when evidence points to the opposite. Gratitude is internal; thankfulness is external. You do not need something good to happen to have gratitude, and when bad things happen, your gratitude does not falter. You know that sad

things are just a part of life, and you are happy with the life you lead. The Apostle Paul said that he learned to be content in whatever circumstance he found himself.

By the way, did you hear that Former Olympic skier Pickabo Street donated a huge sum of money to a local hospital's building campaign. In gratitude, the hospital named a whole unit after her-- it's now the Picabo ICU.

In a few moments, we are going to affirm our gratitude to God, expressed through our giving. *All things come of Thee, O God, and of thine own have we given Thee.* I have learned that people who love and have a personal relationship with God truly understand this. They are people who are always grateful for their blessings and are not afraid to say so and to express it through their giving of their time, talent, and treasure.

Are you grateful for all the blessings God has given you? Are you grateful to be a part of this wonderful congregation know as St. Dunstan's? Like David, do you believe in the vision enough to help make it a reality, even if you may not live to see it? I hope you will prayerfully, thankfully, and gratefully consider what you will give for the furtherance of God's Kingdom here at St. Dunstan's. May God continue to bless you and the people and ministry of our church family, AMEN

and for the service for the house of God they gave 5,000 talents (187 tons of gold) **and 10,000 darics of gold** (~185 pounds), **and 10,000 talents of silver** (375 tons), **and 18,000 talents of brass** (675 tons), **and 100,000 talents of iron** (3750 tones) - These quantities are staggering and would equate with many billions of dollars in our day. The exact number is not crucial, but what is clear is that David's appeal struck a chord in the people's hearts!

THOUGHT

Many church buildings are valuable in that they are multi-purpose. Some house Christian schools during the week. Some offer meals, shelter, or other daily provisions for struggling members of the community. A church building is often the hub of social life in a small town, being the site of dinners, meetings, and youth activities. A church building is usually viewed as a safe place, a refuge for travelers or those in need. Regardless of denomination, most churches represent a link to God for those outside the faith and are often a drawing card for people in crisis.

Thankfulness vs. gratitude:

However, what many do not realize is that being thankful and practicing gratitude are quite different things.

By choosing to cultivate gratitude in your life, you are actively improving your health and well-being. [A study from the University of California Berkeley states](#), “Research suggests that gratitude may be associated with many benefits for individuals, including better physical and psychological health, increased happiness and life satisfaction, decreased materialism, and more.”

Gratitude is about being content physically and mentally with the state of your life. You may not always be happy, but you can still practice gratitude. In fact, the same study from Berkely asserts that practicing gratitude is not only good for you but for your relationships as well.

The study states that “Gratitude is also important to forming and maintaining social relationships.” When you engage with someone and express gratitude for them, they are in turn more likely to express gratitude in return. The expression of gratitude is what helps us form new relationships and strengthen our current ones. Studies have shown the positive effect of relationships on our emotional well-being, and it is one more added benefit of practicing gratitude.

The Differences Between Gratitude and Thankfulness

So how do you know if you are operating from a spirit of gratitude? As already mentioned, gratitude is an important part of keeping a healthy psychological outlook, but it is closely related to thankfulness. So, what are the differences?

- Thankfulness fades-Gratitude remains: Gratitude often begins as thankfulness, but the difference happens when you keep your focus on everything that remains as thankfulness fades. Gratitude will stay with you.
- Gratitude deepens our inner connections-Thankfulness is external: We feel thankful when something happens externally. When we practice gratitude, we rely on our inner voice to stay positive and remain appreciative in all circumstances.
- Thankfulness is about the present interaction-Gratitude improves the long-term relationship: You may feel thankful to someone at the moment, but gratitude is an ongoing showing of appreciation in your relationships. Practicing gratitude in your relationships will bring you closer to the ones you love.

Although gratitude and thankfulness are closely related, gratitude provides you with a longer-lasting feeling of satisfaction and improved well-being.

There is no right or wrong way to practice gratitude. Gratitude should be an internal expression of your own thankfulness, but many people find physical acts of gratitude increase and maintain their happiness on a long-term basis.

Below are some suggestions for your own gratitude practice. According to John Hopkins, by choosing a gratitude practice, you are ensuring resilience when times are bad. You are maintaining a positive attitude, and you are lessening your risk of depression.

1. Start a gratitude journal. Your gratitude journal can be as simple or elaborate as you please. It can be digital on your laptop, or you can buy a notebook to share your thoughts and feelings. If you hate writing, you can use a voice recording app on your phone to speak in your journal. Most people begin a gratitude journal by writing three things they are grateful for daily. If you want to write more, you can. The key is to find a way to be consistent with the journaling.
2. Begin a meditation practice. Mindfulness and gratitude go hand in hand. Finding time to meditate for even a brief period daily can have a tremendous effect on your well-being. As you meditate, you can silently list the things you are grateful for or you can simply repeat a mantra like, "I am grateful for all that I am and all that I have." Hate sitting still? Take a walk and use that time to think about your gratitude list.
3. Sign up to volunteer. Giving your time to help others is a fantastic way to show gratitude. Find an organization that interests you and see what volunteer opportunities they offer. When we help others, we are reminded of all that we have and instantly feel grateful.
4. Spend time with loved ones. Spending time with your loved ones often is an effective way to remain grateful. Having close friends and family helps us feel supported and loved. By pursuing your relationships and creating memories, you will create a list of gratitude memories to draw on when you need a pick me up.
5. Give away to others. Find things in your home that you no longer use and donate them to a charity in need. We all have items that lie around the house and cause clutter. Clear out the clutter and brighten someone else's day with a donation. When we realize all that, we have, it is impossible not to maintain an attitude of gratitude.

Expressing gratitude is beneficial in many ways. Thankfulness is also an important value to cultivate. Together, they make the world a kinder and happier place. To maintain good mental and physical health, consider cultivating your own gratitude practice using the above suggestions. Share the idea of gratitude with your friends and loved ones. Remember, your attitude is always within your control-make it a grateful one!