

The question that arises from this sermon title is: how do we see God as active in our lives, individually and collectively?

It may have seemed strange for the Old Testament reading describing parts of the creation story as the texts to support this message. However, whenever we take another look at Scripture from a different angle or lens, we find new truths. The creation account reveals that creation is entirely in God's hands and it reflects His divine will to generously provide for us all. God's creation has a balance to each of the elements to ensure that the processes can be self-perpetuating. For example, plants, all earth creatures, and humans have a male and female component so that reproduction is ensured. Taking into consideration the complexity of the universe, its enormous size and balanced processes gave me a new appreciation for the statement "God is Love. God's love is full of grace, unconditional and eternal. "We serve the sovereign God of the universe."

Looking at the sermon title, another way to say Intentional Grace is deliberate goodwill. Grace is defined as the freely given, unmerited favor and love from God. It reflects the spirit of God operating in humans to regenerate and strengthen them. It is God's way of reassuring us that we are both significant and loved. Christ so that God's activity in creation is deliberate and independent of any outside influences. We serve the sovereign God of the universe.

If we had any doubts, consider the verse we all know, and likely by heart. For God so loved the world that He gave his only son, Jesus, that whoever believes in him will not be lost, but have everlasting life.

Now, what about our response to God? It is my contention that his intentional grace should foster in us intentional gratitude. I have noticed that we throw out the word gratitude pretty often and not always with much more than a thank you to follow it up. One of my favorite "growing up" stories has to do with what a kid is expected to do after attending a birthday party. At the end of the party, the mom or dad comes to pick up "little Suzy or Johnny." All right, so what do you say to Mrs. Smith? So, the child stands in front of Mrs. Smith and says by rote. "Thank you, Mrs. Smith, for inviting me to your party. I had a nice time." By comparison,

consider this statement about gratitude. Gratitude: a powerful catalyst for happiness.”

What follows is a brief description of some benefits of giving God thanks.

1. **Gratitude glorifies God.** Acknowledgement that all we have comes from God.
2. **Gratitude helps us see God.** Gratitude helps us sense God’s presence as He works in us and around us.
3. **Gratitude brings peace.** It helps us see God in all of our circumstances. In one reflection in the Upper Room, the writer tells of going to bed and thanking God for the blessings of the day. It helped foster restful sleep.
4. **Gratitude draws us to God.** When I reflected upon the magnitude of the creation story, it made me more in awe for what we have been given.
5. **Gratitude brings contentment.** Gratitude brings contentment. If we are not grateful for what God has given us, getting more will not satisfy us either. William Wordsworth said it so well in one of his poems, entitled The World Is Too Much With Us. “Getting and spending we lay waste our powers; little we see in nature is ours; We have given our hearts away. “ It certainly seems this way if you see the myriad of ads that come to us on TV, our phones and in the newspapers. The holidays just make it that much worse. One just wants to tune it all out.
6. **Gratitude helps us to live in the present.** It opens our eyes to the pleasures in ordinary. Each week in our virtual Fellowship Time, we share God sightings. Glimpses of God in nature are a common comment. We are thankful for the activity of the hummingbirds fluttering around our bird feeders. We are grateful for calves being born. There are stories of the joy of watching our grandchildren take on new skills or making us laugh with their humorous antics.

No one would dispute that 2020 has been a tough year. There is the devastation of wildfires, the damage done because of hurricanes and tornadoes, the painful realities of our worldwide pandemic and just a sense of strife because of lack of cooperation among leaders in our governments. Yet, when I am about to give in to despair, there are the many examples of how generous and caring we can be. POM has been able to provide rent stipends in larger numbers than in past years because of generous grants of one sort or another. Both food banks have so far been able to supply groceries to people in need. On the news at night there are most always segments that show the donations being made available to help feed those who do not have enough. Some of the small businesses who are stretched in their budgets

still manage to make meals for others, supply laptops to students who cannot afford them, and do their best to continue to pay employees their benefits. I would never want to see this kind of turmoil, yet it has shown me that there are lots of good people all over the world who extend themselves to be kind and generous to those who have less. “When you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.”

I would like to end this message with a Prayer of Intercession: in Gratitude to You, O Lord¹. The response to each phrase is **we pray in gratitude to you, O Lord.**

God of the living,
with all Your creatures great and small
we sing Your bounty and Your goodness,
for in the harvest of land and ocean,
in the cycles of the seasons,
and the wonders of each creature,
You reveal Your generosity.
Teach us the gratitude that dispels envy,
that we may honor each gift as You cherish Your creation,
and praise You in all times and places.
That this day may be holy, good and joyful:
we pray in gratitude to You, O Lord.
That we may offer to You our worship and praise along
with the work of our hands, minds and hearts:
we pray in gratitude to You, O Lord.
That we may strive for the well-being of all creation:
we pray in gratitude to You, O Lord.
That in the pleasures and pains of life,
we may know the love of Christ and be thankful:
we pray in gratitude to You, O Lord.
That we may be bound together by Your Holy Spirit,
in communion with all Your holy ones,
entrusting one another and all our life to Christ:
we pray in gratitude to You, O Lord.
That we may always and everywhere give thanks to You, O God,
for all of our blessings and giftedness:
we pray in gratitude to You, O Lord.

¹ posted on the website of the Christian Brothers of the Midwest.