

November 22nd, 2020 • Consecration/Thanksgiving Sunday • Online Worship

## “Grateful”

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris



*Psalm 65:1-2, 5-8 (NIV)*

*Praise awaits you, our God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled. You who answer prayer, to you all people will come. You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations. The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy.*

It's Thanksgiving Sunday and Consecration Sunday, when we dedicate our financial pledge for the ministry and mission of the church in this coming year. That's normal at this time of year in the church. Yet, of course, this year, nothing is normal about either in 2020. Many, if not most of us, have needed to create a new plan for how to celebrate Thanksgiving setting aside many of our traditions around this day. However you celebrate this year, give thanks and stay safe. Keep your loved ones safe. We pray that the changes we make this one year may make it possible for us to regather all together for Thanksgivings still to come.

And Consecration Sunday! We don't have our big Lucite box here in the front of the sanctuary. We won't have that incredible profound experience of coming forward to place our own pledge card in the box, joined together, part of this beautiful, faithful, generous community of faith. This year we've mailed or brought in our cards individually or pledged online, one by one. But you know what? If you close your eyes for a moment, you can sense that feeling of us all acting as one, together, determined to stay strong and stay committed. You can sense the synergy we create together, for the whole is more than the sum of the parts. Each pledge is important, and what we pledge together creates the energy and resilience to keep our boat moving forward towards the Kingdom of God. It creates in us a sense of awe.

We've been experiencing this over the course of this year's Stewardship Campaign, haven't we? Remember how the frightened travelers in the boat were awestruck at the power of God in Christ Jesus to calm the wind and the sea? They were "filled with great awe," the Scripture tells us.

And remember how, in the early church, we heard that "awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common." The awesome power of God, as seen and experienced in Christ Jesus on the boat, has become operative in and through the lives and actions and words of the travelers on the boat, the apostles, and all disciples.

But wait! There's more! The big picture! In today's reading from Psalm 65, we heard Witney speak the words of the forgiveness and blessings of our God who answers our prayer, filling us with the all the good things of God's house. All the awesome and righteous deeds of God, as the Psalmist puts it. Creating us, saving us, pardoning us, healing us, providing for us, holding us close, never leaving us alone, quieting the roaring seas, calming our fears, bringing peace in our hearts and among the nations.

"The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders," sings the Psalmist, "where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy."

You'll hear William Martinez sing a beautiful song of joy for our Offertory this morning. "Grateful" it's called, by John Bucchino. "I've got a heart that can hold love. I've got a mind that can think. There may be times when I lose the light and let my spirits sink. But I can't stay depressed when I remember how I'm blessed. Grateful, grateful. Truly grateful I am. Grateful, grateful. Truly blessed and duly grateful."

Being grateful recalibrates our hearts and over time shapes and guides our life. “Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life...gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.” Gratefulness becomes a bright star, leading us to a new, deeper, more generous place. And in this way, gratefulness changes our hearts and changes our world.

William sings: “It’s not that I don’t want a lot or hope for more, or dream of more. But giving thanks for what I’ve got makes me so much happier than keeping score. In a world that can bring pain, I will still take each chance. For I believe that whatever the terrain, our feet can learn to dance. Whatever stone life may sling, we can moan or we can sing. Grateful, grateful. Truly grateful I am. Grateful, grateful. Truly blessed and duly grateful.”

Even in this year of 2020, even in the midst of a deadly pandemic, even in the midst of election turmoil, even in the midst of loss and challenges in our personal lives, even in the midst of juggling work and children and school, even amidst pared down holiday plans, even as we look towards a future we cannot yet clearly see...we know that the Lord our God is still in our midst, recalibrating our hearts, our minds, our vision of the future.

We can sing, we can dance, we can give thanks. And drawing strength from God and from one another, with grateful hearts we will serve the Lord. We will love and we will give and we will be the hope. May God weave circles of new vision, new hope, new resolve for all the possibilities that may await, opportunities not yet explored, acts of courage and generosity not yet dared.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.

Notes:

Diana Butler Bass. *Grateful—The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks*. New York: HarperOne, 2018.