

## “Freedom to Dream”

Rev. David Gregory

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Pentecost 25



### Readings

When was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it for me.”

~ Matthew 25:37-40 Adapted from the New Revised Standard Version

A message we need today . . . is to dream of and labor for a world where so much more is possible; one where immediate needs being met is only the beginning, the foundation, the lowest bar; one where structures of inequality are entirely abolished and minds and bodies and communities and spirits are free to dream of possibilities unimaginable to us today; one where resources are freed up for so much more than mere survival.

~ Rev. Anna Blaedel in *Liturgy that Matters*

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As most everyone knows by now, we offer a variety of online programs each week in addition to our Sunday video and our Sunday gatherings on Zoom. Some of you attend one or more of these offerings, but I’ve noticed that each gathering has also developed its own unique following. People join us regularly from places as far away as Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, and Oregon, and our reach has expanded in ways that might never have happened without the challenge of a pandemic.

Every Friday at noon we offer a spiritual practice hosted on Zoom by Joanne Lefferts, our longtime office manager who is also a trained spiritual director. Joanne welcomes people from a wide variety of spiritual traditions and backgrounds, and they lead us in practices that are special to them. In the process, these practices greatly enrich our own experience of spirituality. A couple of weeks ago we were led in a gratitude practice by our Muslim friend, Khadija Hansia-Gibson, a local businesswoman, a wife and mother, an interfaith activist, and a longtime friend of our congregation. She taught us a prayer of

thankfulness using the knuckles as silent calculators, the idea being to offer thanks for thirty-three things in rapid succession. It was a challenge for those of us who are used to waxing on with longer stories of our gratuities. What if instead we had to come up with thirty-three single words or concepts without a lot of thought and almost no explanation? What if we were to do it rapidly and multiple times a day?

At our house we've been trying to incorporate at least some this idea into a daily practice before dinner each evening, and the effect is rather stunning. Before long you become conscious of all kinds of things — big things and small things, the important as well as the insignificant — until a wave of gratitude starts to carry you along, and the practice becomes easier and easier to do. Pretty soon, even insignificant things become significant. When you're in the habit of being thankful for every little thing, the big things come right along with them. Feeling gratitude becomes more than something you do; it becomes who you are.

One of our rituals at CCC is a Thanksgiving feast on the Sunday before the national holiday (and yes, it would have been happening today). With the sanctuary full of tables and people and plates of delicious food, it has also been the time when we give thanks and consecrate the financial gifts that are being pledged for the coming year. Some call it "Stewardship Sunday," and lest we think that financial considerations are less spiritual than others, this is an opportunity to recognize that everything we have and everything we are, we hold with an open hand. We are in community, in the collective, and we work for the common good whether it be within the walls of the church or where we're all living at the moment, outside of those walls.

Earlier this week I read the transcript of an interview with Dr. Anthony Fauci in which a journalist asked him, "When do you think we can be back to normal?" I thought to myself, *What an interesting question!* and I recognized that answering it would necessitate the ability to define what "normal" is in the first place. When can we have the basics of our lives back in place? When can we visit our loved ones, enjoy a meal in a busy restaurant, or pick up some of those projects we've had to lay aside? When can we travel again? When can we go to church, see a movie, or hug a friend on the street? Dr. Fauci's answer wasn't exactly what we'd all like to hear, but at least it was honest, accessibly stated, and based in science. Much of what we call "normal life" remains on hold, because it must. In the meantime, we must be good stewards of the new reality that has presented itself. The placing of our resources of time, energy, and treasure indicates the meaning of stewardship in our lives.

When Matthew's gospel speaks of how the nations might be judged at the end of time, we hear that it will be according to their treatment of the "least of these," those whose lived experience is dominated by the scarcity of simple things like food, clothing, or shelter; those who do not have the luxury of dreaming of anything else. There's no bigger picture to be had when all life is on hold. There is a sense in which all of our dreams are on hold, and we long for the day when we can release the brakes and continue forward. That day is coming indeed, when in the words of Anna Blaedel, we can "dream of and labor for a world where so much more is possible; one where immediate needs being met is only the beginning." If our dream is only about getting things back to normal, we may be forever disappointed. The experience of the last year has been nothing less than a huge wake up call, and it's a call to gratitude. It's a call that we may recognize only because we've had to stop, to wait, to think about what we're doing and how it might affect the lives of people we pass on the street as well as their loved ones.

Today we offer our gratitude for the air we breathe, for clean, fresh water, and bountiful fresh food. We are grateful for hummingbirds, for letter carriers and the dogs who bark at them. We appreciate all of the essential workers who support our lives each day, many of whom are behind the scenes and will never be seen by us. We offer thanks for the rains that have finally come to us, as well as bright sunny mornings that summon us outside our homes and into the fresh air of a new day.

We offer thanks for the community that is our church, for the blessings and challenges of its history, for the exquisite setting of our gathering spaces, and for friendships that sustain us through times of adversity, for those who dedicate their time and energy to the health of the congregation, the care of the property, and the legacy we leave for future generations. We're grateful for the memory of those we've lost this year, the joy of friends we've yet to meet, for the blessings of the loving care offered to those who struggle to find health and well being. We are thankful for those who knowingly place themselves in harm's way for the freedom and protection of others, and for the sacrifices made by many people and their families to ensure that we can be safe and free. And we're deeply grateful for a world where, as we've been told today, so much more is possible; one where immediate needs being met is only the beginning, the foundation, the lowest bar; one where structures of inequality are entirely abolished and minds and bodies and communities and spirits are free to dream of possibilities unimaginable to us today; one where resources are freed up for so much more than mere survival.

I hope you'll walk with us through the coming year, and that your presence will deepen us, challenge us, and call us to unimaginable things. I hope you'll gather with us next year for a Thanksgiving feast, when we recount the great flow of divine blessing that got us way past normal, to the things that are instead extraordinary.

