THE REV. CANON EMILY GRIFFIN, CANON VICAR
THANKSGIVING DAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2025
DEUTERONOMY 26:1-11; PSALM 100; 1 PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9; JOHN 6:25-35

WAYS TO GRATITUDE

John 6:25-35 *[When the crowd found Jesus on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, `He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."]*

Do we think or act our way to gratitude? If circumstances make it hard this year to be thankful, then how do we get there? It's often said there are no "shoulds" on our feelings, but no one really buys that on Thanksgiving. Shouldn't we feel thankful? Interestingly, our reading from Deuteronomy doesn't say a word about feelings. It's all about action. Feelings might follow, but that's not the point. Moses tells the people: give as a way of remembering what God has given to you. Bring yourself along with your gift and then tell the story of what God has done – not just for you, but for those who came before you. And say it out loud, so that those who

come after you will know that they have a story worth telling too.

It doesn't sound so different from what we do here every Sunday. The words and the methods of giving might differ. We may or may not be able to show up in person on a given week, but the idea that there is a place where we can come and give thanks is a powerful one.

In my first parish, I had a parishioner who started attending church for the first time in her life at age 70. I asked her why, and she said that she'd always thought church was about saying you're sorry. She didn't need church for that. She could do that on her own. What she needed was a way to say thank you, and for that – she needed space where God's presence was intentionally welcomed and invited. She needed music and a place where it mattered. She needed people around her to remind her of all she couldn't be expected to do on her own. And she needed a place where she could give in return. That place became church.

Likewise, the language we learn here gives us words for realities we might otherwise forget. For all the glories of our current Prayer Book, it drops some crucial words from the offertory that I'm grateful to have learned from priests who came before me. Some of you might remember "All things come of Thee, O Lord; and of thine own have we given thee." We tend to let the choir or the organ signal our thanksgiving these days as the offering is collected, but the principle remains. We are able to give of our time, our talent, our treasure because of the life, the health, the intelligence, the hard-won wisdom that God has given us. Sometimes, the things we say and do in public – the ways we witness to the best of our beliefs, to

what we hope is true - create the path that connect our head and our heart. They bring us to a place of honest gratitude.

But action is not a failsafe plan. Sometimes the externals remain just that. They reflect what we want people to see, not what's happening within. For Paul, in our reading from Philippians, doing is only half the battle. What we think can have just as much power. We often see what we're prepared to see, what we've trained our eyes to look for. If we're focusing on what is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, or commendable, in ourselves or in others, if we trust that things that are excellent and worthy of praise are out there to be found, we're a lot more likely to find them. Whether it's the music you hear this morning, or the food you eat this afternoon, the beauty you see on your walk or drive home, or an unexpected kindness shared with no expectation of return – try giving these things their due. Our failures and disappointments, our losses and pain are real. Gratitude is not about erasing what's true; it's allowing ourselves to name and value what else is true.

But lest we think it's all on us – that's not the case either. There are things we can do, places we can go, words we can say, thoughts we can orient to, sure – but gratitude itself is also a gift from God. We can't force it any more than we can force love or joy or any of God's other great gifts. But we can pray for it and be open to what Jesus called "bread from heaven" – whatever nourishes us or gives us energy, whatever truly satisfies or delights us. Or as George Herbert writes in a poem to God called "Gratefulness:" "Thou that hast giv'n so much to me, give one thing more, a grateful heart." The poem ends:

"Wherefore I crie, and crie again; and in no quiet canst thou be, till I a thankful heart obtain of thee: Not thankful when it pleaseth me, as if thy blessings had spare days: but such a heart, whose pulse may be thy praise." Gratitude is about so much more than our feelings; it's offering all of who we are – body, mind, and spirit – to the One who made us to be useful for the life of the world, in ways we can see and in ways we might never see. In the Name of the One who never stops giving and who gives us a story worth telling, Amen.

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