

May 12, 2024

Thriv'era | We Are...Grateful

Pastor Paul Gauche

I'm in a "remembering" state of mind, and I'm so very grateful. I think it's because I'm in the last six weeks of my nearly 29 years of life with you here that I'm naturally doing a lot of remembering. Let me share some of that with you. I'm remembering all of the deeply Spirited moments in this place where we've gathered to worship, sing, study, and pray so that we could be sent to serve, inspire, and model lives of discipleship in the world around us. I'm feeling so grateful! I'm remembering all of the Creative collaboration with preachers, teachers, readers, communion servers, ushers, greeters, photographers, painters, and musicians! The music—oh, the music! And I'm filled with gratitude! I'm remembering conversations with so many people who have experienced the deep joy of being Connected to a community of faith that embraces such a clear, welcoming, and boldly inclusive theology, a church that opens its doors as wide as possible to be the welcoming presence of Christ for all people—no exceptions. And I'm filled with gratitude! I'm remembering how we've been Present with one another through so many moments of both sorrow and joy.

As I've often said, "I may be your pastor, but I'm so deeply grateful for the countless ways you've been my minister as we shared this life together." I'm filled with gratitude! I'm so Grateful to remember our journey through so many changes and transitions in life—from the milestones of births, baptisms, confirmations, and graduations to engagements, weddings, and marriages. When Nancy Lee and I arrived, Sarah was in 4th grade, and Soren was in 2nd grade. Six "Hoonies" later, our oldest granddaughter, Ruby Grace, is in 5th grade, and our newest grandson, Geno, is 14 days old today! Have I mentioned I'm a grandparent? I'm so grateful. What a generous community of faith you are, erasing a mountain of debt to create new ministries that bring hope and wholeness to so many through this missional community. So, yes, a lot of memories are swirling for me. And I'm so deeply grateful!

We're continuing our Easter Series through Thriv'era. We've been exploring what it means to thrive no matter the circumstances. We acknowledged a core truth that thriving does not happen apart from the challenges that we experience personally and as a community. In our context here at Prince of Peace, we've experienced some difficult, challenging, heartbreaking days. And yet, because Christ is risen, we know that thriving occurs at the intersection of Christ's resurrection and our daily lives. As followers of the risen Christ, we can be grateful in every circumstance that Christ is the Lord of the Church and that God makes a way where there is no way! As our journey continues, we'll move through this transformational experience toward a deepened sense of our identity, purpose, vision, and mission as a community of Christ Followers who are spirited, creative, and connected people, called to be present, grateful, generous, and missional in our lives. We do that, remembering that God calls and equips us to bring some good to each moment, something better to each day, and our best to each other as we encounter the world around us.

The key word in all of this: "Remember." From the beginning of time, humans have valued "remembering" by expressing gratitude for the past and looking forward with gratitude to the future. Our Hebrew ancestors and the Christ-followers in every generation knew this very well. Our whole Judeo-Christian faith is rooted in holding on to this core truth: "To remember where God has led us is to trust where God is leading us." Before a word of scripture was ever written down, it was first memorized, then remembered, then recalled, and retold around campfires in the desert, on the mountain, in the home, and along the road. The people of God in every age were commanded to remember the scriptures and to write them on their hearts so that they could express gratitude to God for God's faithfulness. The scriptures are filled with reminders to remember so that gratitude can thrive. In the very heart of the Book of Psalms, the Psalmist demonstrates for us what it means to remember the faithful deeds of our faithful God. Let's take a look at Psalm 77:11-20.

¹¹I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; I will remember your wonders of old. ¹²I will meditate on all your work and muse on your mighty deeds.

¹³Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God? ¹⁴You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the people.

¹⁵With your strong arm, you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. ¹⁶When the waters saw you, O God when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled. ¹⁷The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side. ¹⁸The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. ¹⁹Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters, yet your footprints were unseen. ²⁰You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. (Psalm 77:11-20)

This is just one of many ancient passages calling people to remember God's faithfulness with gratitude. Psalm 77 reaches into the collective memory of the people of Israel, challenging them to bring God's past faithfulness to their present and lead them into the future. To understand the importance of remembering, we have to understand what it means in the Hebrew consciousness. The best way to understand remembering is to imagine the ancient Hebrew people moving into the future by remembering the past—not dwelling in the past but remembering the past, bringing smaller pieces of the past into the present to move into the future. That's a lot. Let me break that down. For the ancient Hebrew people, "remembering" was the opposite of "dismembering." To dismember is to take apart. To remember is to bring together. So, in the Hebrew consciousness, to "remember" was to gather together the countless narratives of God's past faithfulness in their lives and to give thanks as they moved into the future. Remembering where God had led them was to trust where God was leading them.

In the passage from Psalm 77, the Psalmist remembers God's faithfulness, which leads to gratitude. The Hebrew people knew that remembering the past, not dwelling in it, but bringing it all together was a powerful way to move

into the future. They remembered their rescue from generations of oppression in Egypt under Pharaoh. They remembered God's presence with them in the wilderness, providing daily bread, water from a rock, forgiveness, healing, comfort, and love. They remembered God's faithful guidance from the wilderness into the Land Promised, a land flowing with milk and honey—a rich metaphor for God's ongoing provision of life and aliveness. Often enough, the people built what they would call an Ebenezer, a pile of stones as a visual, physical, tangible memorial to acknowledge God's faithful presence in their lives. This has important implications for us today. Let me offer two things to remember this weekend, two thoughts on how to bring this home with you.

First, remembering God's past faithfulness leads to wholeness. The good news of the Gospel is that no matter how much we might feel like we're coming apart at the seams, God is always putting us back together. God is always 'remembering' us. That's what it means to become a new creation in Christ. By remembering who we are, we place ourselves into the daily care of God which frees us up to express gratitude. It is the stuff of legend that Martin Luther woke up each morning and, as his feet hit the cold floor, said out loud, "I am baptized!" It was Luther's way of remembering the promise that God had first made to him in baptism: that he was named, claimed, and loved by God. For that, Luther expressed gratitude.

The same is so for us. Part of the practice of Thriv'era involves embracing the thriving rhythm of gratitude. The Guiding Narrative provides some insight: "As image bearers of the Divine, our calling extends to embodying a spirit of gratitude in all aspects of our lives. We thrive together as grateful people who practice gratitude as a spirited discipline, remembering with joy and thanksgiving that all we have is an expression of God's grace." When we take the time to remember who we are and to whom we belong, we have the confidence to step into the future of just this day. Remembering leads to wholeness. Remembering puts us back together again and puts us back into God.

As a practice, each morning when you wake up, set a reminder to repeat this simple mantra: "I will remember this: I am named, claimed, and loved by God." Beginning each new day with that reframes everything that comes our way.

Second, remembering God's past faithfulness leads to a future filled with gratitude. The good news of the Gospel is that there is nowhere we can go where God is not. We can be deeply grateful that there is no past so scary, dark, or painful... that God cannot reassure, lighten, or heal. We can be deeply grateful that there is no present so painful, broken, or despairing... that God will not comfort, mend, or bring hope. We can be deeply grateful that there is no past that can't be restored in the present; there is no present that cannot be reimagined in God's future, and there is no death into which God will not breathe new life. We know this to be true because we remember that God has been faithful, is now faithful, and will always be faithful.

And so, as a practice, when you crawl into bed at the end of each day, close your eyes and repeat this simple mantra: "To remember where God has led me is to trust where God is leading me."