

Order of Service -- November 18, 2018
Enough: Radical Gratitude and the Economy of Grace

Musical Prelude

Greeting -- Radical Gratitude and the Economy of Grace

1st Hymn: We Gather Together, Green 52

Readings -- Psalm 23, Isaiah 55:1-2; Genesis 33:11; John 7:37-38

2nd Hymn: Eternal and Infinite Source of All Grace, Green 27

Joys and Concerns

Musical interlude

Prayer -- Eternal and Infinite Source of All Grace

3rd Hymn: Spring Forth a Well, Green 151

Message: Our Cup Overflows

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Greeting

Good Morning Friends. In her book *Radical Gratitude*, Roman Catholic theologian and author Mary Leddy wrote, “In the practice of radical gratitude... we awaken to another way of being, another kind of economy, the great economy of grace.”

This week we celebrate our national holiday of Thanksgiving. We come as one nation to the one day we set aside in the midst of all our differences and all the ways that a complex and fraught history informs the present, to practice gratitude. Embedded, as we are, in this particular human economy, which as a whole, is oriented neither toward grace nor gratitude, my hope for us today is to pause together for moment and consider what it could mean to practice radical gratitude, what it could mean to awaken to our being part of a great economy of grace. And so we'll begin by singing our first hymn together, from the *Green hymnal, number 52, We Gather Together*.

Readings

Psalm 23

¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of justice for his name's sake. ⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Isaiah 55: 1-2 Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the living waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ²Why do you spend your money for that which is not the bread of life, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me. Eat what is good and be satisfied.

Genesis 33:11 *Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.*

John 7:37-38 ³⁷*On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'*"

Prayer

Eternal and Infinite Source of All Grace, Great Shepherd, Wellspring of Holiness, we come here because we thirst. We gather together because we hunger. We ask for your blessing. We long to rest contented, beside the still waters to which you lead us. Restore our souls, we pray, that we may know contentment, that we may know we always have everything we need. Help us, Holy One, to be satisfied with all that you have given, to know that it is enough. Give us grateful hearts we pray, that we may give them over to you. Help us rest in the knowledge that thou art with us, that we dwell with you and in you, and you in us. Eternal and Infinite Source of All Grace, Wellspring of Holiness... thank you for this overflowing cup, these living waters you have given us to drink. in gratitude and thanksgiving we pray together today Amen.

Benediction

May all who hunger and thirst be satisfied.

May all gather together at the table of the house of the Lord.

May all eat of the bread of life and drink from overflowing cups of living water.

May all give thanks and praise.

For the Lord is our shepherd, and we shall not want.

We have enough.

Message

Our family has a practice of what we call ‘gratefuls,’ in which we go around the dinner table and each say three things that we are grateful for. One evening three years ago, during the season of spirited acquisition in which our culture encourages us to dwell between Thanksgiving and Christmas, my son Cyrus, who was 7, said impatiently, “I don’t want to talk about what I’m grateful for, I want to talk about what I want!” He was concerned that we fully comprehend the shape and scope of his Christmas list. His words come back to me every year at this time because of the concisely honest and childlike way that he gave voice to his lived experience that it is difficult to call attention to gratitude, while directing our thoughts to what we currently feel we are lacking. There is a mental paradox or friction -- between the experience of ‘enough’ that the deliberate practice of gratitude brings, and the experience of ‘not-enough’ that wanting what we don’t have can bring. It’s really hard, as Cyrus attested, to do both at once.

And yet, I think that holding that tension of both want and fullness is the curriculum, the challenge, the opportunity of being both embodied and inspired. We are always wanting. And we are always already fulfilled. This is something of the mystery of our human nature, given of both body and spirit. Richard Wright, professor of science and religion at Union Theological Seminary, has written that the evolutionary process of natural selection has hardwired animals in general and humans in particular to be recurrently dissatisfied. He argues that our chemical and metabolic constitutions make for a built in motivational mechanism because we are never permanently contented. We don’t just eat once and then we’re done, for example -- We’re built to get hungry again. And again. And again. The evolutionary theory posits that the need to seek more to fulfil our material needs ends up optimizing our chances of surviving, and maybe even thriving, by ensuring that we don’t sit contented for the duration of our days. Instead have to get out there and strive for more, and in the process maybe meet a mate, maybe even pass our genes onto the next generation, and thus continue life itself. Evolutionary Psychologists have argued alongside their biology colleagues that a built-in persistent attention to what is lacking, to what is not yet enough, to the thing we will need in the moment to come, has also been a factor in propelling human social evolution. Through millions of years of perils, hazards, and famines -- without claws, talons or tough hides -- we have attuned our individual and collective

neural pathways to the insufficiencies to be mitigated, the empty larders to be stocked, lest we not make it through the harrowing winter to come. Our want and need have made us band together, share, cooperate, maximize efficiency, and have impelled efforts for social justice. according to evolutionary psychologists, Seeing through a lens that focuses our perspective toward what we'd like to change, what we'd like to see that we do not currently view, *what we want* -- as my son said in his clear voice -- is part of what set in motion great innovations in human self-governance, understanding, and collaborative endeavor. Our very want has been an impetus toward progress, a seed of human ingenuity. In wanting and striving, humans have crafted psalms, symphonies, and constitutions, and created tools, technologies, and whole cities out of our need to improve upon, our search for a better life, a better way, a more perfect union, an ever greater pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

I like the way this evolutionary narrative takes a characteristic with a negative aspect -- a generalized species-wide restless tendency toward dissatisfaction -- and performs an inversion, transforms it into the material and spiritual hunger that calls us forward, that leads us on. Like anger that is a fierce love, a thirst for justice -- dissatisfaction with what is not-enough and attention to what could be different -- can be a deep and divine inner leading to change what must be changed. The Bible is full of these kinds of inversions. The strength that is made perfect in weakness. The lowliest beggar who is the place where the Holy resides. The barren womb that brings forth new life. I appreciate this kind of poetic paradox as a particular mark of the way that God works in this world. And so perhaps the tension between not-enough and enough, between dissatisfaction and contentment, between 'what I want' and 'thank you for what I have' is just such a place of holy paradox. Just such a place where God is at work.

The etymological roots of the word economy have to do with the wise management of resources understood to be scarce. Grace comes from the same roots as gratitude and grateful, with other flavorings of gratuitous favor and praise, usually understood as an unmerited outpouring of unbounded generosity from a holy source. This makes the phrase 'Economy of Grace' an oxymoron, as Grace is something that is never scarce, the opposite of something that needs judicious management, and this points us once again to that place of paradox, that place

where, in the flesh, we work, we struggle, we sing, we dance, we strive and create -
- living --evolving -- between want and fullness, between scarcity and plenty.

In these days, these times, Friends, it seems that perhaps we've somehow learned our evolutionary lessons of embodiment too well, and forgotten too often the fullness of Spirit, the wellspring of grace from which we come. when I see advertisements, there is something unbalanced at the very least about the quantity and quality of effort, time and resources that go into channeling, commodifying and capitalizing on want and dissatisfaction. our human hunger, our striving forth for more, our inner and outer experiences of 'not enough' seem, these days so vast. And there are so many of us. it is as if our want is so great, our not-enoughness so voracious that it is self-consuming, that it threatens to swallow the very earth, the very Body of Christ, of which we are a part. Perhaps we are coming now as a species in our long evolution to a new place in this paradox of inspired flesh, embodied Spirit, where we are invited to see that only the Sacred, only God is enough to fill the vastness of the void with which we have been seeded. Perhaps **only** a Radical Gratitude **can** awaken us. the word radical means to have roots, to be rooted. It means, simply, returning to the source. Radical Gratitude means awakening to the fact that we are always planted like a taproot in the wellspring of living waters, that we come from infinite grace.

If Life as it evolved on planet earth lives somehow at least partly through the pursuit of more and the drive to secure an elusive 'enough' -- there is also, underlying the science, underlying both Judeo-Christian tradition and Quaker faith and practice, the knowledge that we participate in something that is inexhaustible, Something that is Enough-ness Itself. If we are given of a thirst that seems unquenchable, and an only-ever temporarily slakeable hunger, we also seem to be given sign posts that point toward an infinite well and a banquet table, prepared for us all by the most generous and holy of hosts, so laden and so grand that even our enemies sit beside us. So, too, have we been given the capacity to drink from that overflowing cup, and to eat of the bread of life. this plentitude outflows over and into this very world. the root cellars are bottomless, full to the brim and beyond, and all have equal access to their bounty. In God's economy there are no have nots, the rules of transactions and trade do not apply. There's no need for greed or hoarding, because That of God is given in equal measure to all who believe, -- that is, to all who come to that well to drink. It is offered to deserving and undeserving

alike. Because that's what grace is. It's gratuitous, and not for profit, cannot be bought or sold, or privatized, and has worth beyond measure. *All can* sit at this table.

So then, this holiday week, let us proclaim our thanksgiving for this feast, this good food that is as always and ever set before us. Let us be satisfied. Let us call it enough. Let us allow the blessings to flow from our hands and hearts, for God has been good to us, and we **do** have enough, and after all, it is our radical gratitude that is the currency in this economy of grace.